The negotiations between six world powers and Iran for a six-month halt in Iran`s controversial nuclear programs Friday hinged on differences over Iran`s demand that it retain the right to enrich uranium and over the operation of a heavy water reactor, news reports said.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was scheduled to travel to Geneva on Friday in an attempt to help close the negotiations, State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a written statement.

“After consulting with EU (European Union) High Representative (Catherine) Ashton and the negotiating team on the ground, Secretary Kerry will travel to Geneva later today with the goal of continuing to help narrow the differences and move closer to an agreement,” Psaki said.

Ashton, the EU`s top negotiator, met with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif earlier in the day.

The Reuters news agency said the differences on one of the major points of dispute – the claim of a sovereign right to enrich uranium - may have been overcome but it did not provide details as to the characteristics of the possible agreement. The news reports said that the talks were expected to continue into the weekend.

The New York Times reported that Zarif told an Iranian news agency that the major point of
disagreement involved Iran’s heavy water reactor at Arak, a facility that would produce plutonium. He said there were two or three other issues that also needed to be resolved.

Negotiators from China, Britain, France, Russia and the United States, the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, plus Germany, since Wednesday have been in engaged a second round of negotiations with Iran. The talks, following up on a first round held earlier in November, were originally scheduled to end Friday.

The world powers have sought a six-month interim agreement that would halt activities at Iranian nuclear facilities. The interim period would be used for negotiations to achieve a comprehensive long-term agreement designed at preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

Iran entered the talks following the election of Hassan Rouhani in June. The new president, a moderate compared to his predecessor, has sought an agreement on the country’s nuclear programs in an attempt to seek relief from the crippling sanctions that have been placed on Iran due to the nuclear program.

Iranian officials said earlier in the year that the sanctions were costing the country between U$S 4 and U$S 8 billion dollars in lost revenue in oil exports. The sanctions have also severely affected the country’s financial sector.

Israel, supported by some Congressional Republicans in the United States, has been highly critical of the interim deal. It has said that no sanctions should be lifted unless full agreement is reached to make it impossible for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon.

Psaki said at the State Department daily briefing the negotiators were making progress.

“Our negotiators are making progress, but as we all know, these issues are complicated and require time to hash out,” she said. “As Secretary Kerry has said, we’re not in a rush to make just any deal. We are working very hard to make sure we get a good deal.”
The State Department spokeswoman said the big issues are Iran`s stockpiles of uranium, the Arak heavy water reactor and the need to assure monitoring of the centrifuges used to enrich uranium. Washington has said it would seek to have Iran`s program frozen to its current status under the terms of the agreement.

The United States would provide Iran between U$S 6 and U$S 7 billion in sanctions relief during the life of the interim agreement.