Second computer worm 'hits Iran'

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Iranians surf the internet at a cybercafe in central Tehran in January. Iran has been hit with new malicious software as part of cyber attacks against the country, a military officer told Mehr news agency on Monday without specifying the target.

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"Certain characteristics about the 'Stars' virus have been identified,

including that it is compatible with the (targeted) system," Gholam Reza Jalali, commander of the Iranian civil defence organisation, told the agency.

"In the initial stage, the damage is low and it is likely to be mistaken for governmental executable files," Jalali said, adding that Iranian experts were still investigating the full scope of the malware's abilities.

He did not say what kind of equipment the virus was targeting or when and how it had been spotted.

Tehran was hit with another computer worm, "Stuxnet," last year, reportedly designed to hurt the Islamic republic's controversial nuclear programme.

Iran has accused arch-foes Washington and Israel of launching Stuxnet, which was publicly identified last June and reportedly mutated and infected at least 30,000 computerised industrial equipment in the following months.

In December, Iran implicitly admitted its uranium enrichment plant in the central city of Natanz, which is regularly inspected by the UN nuclear watchdog, had been the victim of the worm.

Jalali urged the foreign ministry to take appropriate measures amid the ongoing "cyber attacks" against Iran, and said efforts to contain Stuxnet were still ongoing, Mehr reported.

"Confronting the Stuxnet virus does not mean that the threat has been fully removed, since viruses have a certain life span and it is possible that they continue their activity in a different form," he said.

Computer security firm [Symantec](link) said in November that [Stuxnet](link) might

have been designed to disrupt the motors that power gas centrifuges used to enrich uranium -- the most controversial work of Tehran's nuclear programme.

Iran's atomic ambitions are at the heart of a conflict between Tehran and the West, which accuses the Islamic republic of seeking to develop a weapons capability under the guise of a civilian nuclear drive.

Tehran vehemently denies the charges.

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