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Iran and EU agree new nuclear talks



Iran's nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili is to travel to Geneva for the talks

Iran has agreed to hold talks on its controversial nuclear programme, the European Union has said.

The talks are to take place in Geneva on 6 and 7 December, said the EU's foreign policy chief, Baroness Ashton.

They will be the first high-level direct talks with Iran on the nuclear issue since October 2009.

Western powers fear Iran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons, but Tehran insists its uranium enrichment programme is peaceful and legal.

Baroness Ashton's office said that meetings with Iranian chief nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili next week see the EU's foreign policy chief would lead a delegation of officials from the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - US, Russia, China, France and Britain - as well as Germany.

"We've now received a response from the Iranian authorities in which they have said that Dr Jalili has accepted Catherine Ashton's proposal to meet in Geneva", a spokesman said on Tuesday.

Western countries have called on Iran to stop all enrichment of uranium amid accusations that the country is pursuing a secret nuclear weapons programme.

Iran's defiance has led to sanctions on the country, which says it uses nuclear technology only for peaceful purposes.

As a member state of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran says it has the right to enrich

uranium to produce nuclear fuel.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad vowed on Tuesday that his country would not make "one iota" of concessions over its nuclear rights at the meetings in Geneva.

A breakthrough could only be expected if the talks were held under "equal" conditions and if Iran's rights were respected, Mr Ahmadinejad said in a speech broadcast live on state television.

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Iran says nuclear programme was hit by sabotage



Iran had denied that the virus had damaged any of its nuclear plants

Iran's president has said some of the centrifuges used in its uranium enrichment programme were sabotaged, raising suspicions that they were targeted by the Stuxnet computer worm.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said the problems had been created by enemies of Iran, but had had only a limited effect.

Iran has repeatedly denied that Stuxnet had affected its nuclear programme.

The UN said last week that Iran had temporarily halted most of its uranium enrichment work earlier this month.

The West fears Iran's ultimate goal is to build nuclear weapons. Iran says its programme is aimed solely at peaceful energy use.

"They succeeded in creating problems for a limited number of our centrifuges with the software they had installed in electronic parts," Mr Ahmadinejad told a news conference.

"Our specialists stopped that and they will not be able to do it again," he added without elaborating on the software thought to have been used.

The Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency said in a report last week that a temporary stoppage had hit Iran's Natanz enrichment nuclear plant earlier this month.

Experts say the worm, which Iran said in September had attacked its computers, has been

specially configured to damage motors commonly used in uranium-enrichment centrifuges by sending them spinning out of control.

The computer bug is a form of customised malware, written to attack a precise target.

Analysts say the complexity of the code suggests it was created by a "nation state" in the West, rather than an organised crime group.

Senior Iranian officials have said that the virus is evidence that an "electronic war" has been launched against the country.

Mr Ahmadinejad's comments about the cyber attack worm come on the day that a high-profile Iranian nuclear scientist was killed and another wounded in two separate but similar attacks in the capital.

The president accused Israel and the West of being behind the attacks.

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Iran nuclear scientist 'killed in bomb attack'



An Iranian nuclear scientist has been killed and another wounded in two separate, but similar attacks, according to Iranian media reports.

The scientists were targeted in Tehran by attackers who attached bombs to each of their cars, reports said.

The scientist killed has been named as Majid Shahriari of Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, according to the official Irna news agency.

Another scientist was killed in a bomb blast at the beginning of the year.

Dr Shahriari was a member of the nuclear engineering department of Shahid Beheshti University.

His wife is said to have been injured in the attack.

The scientist injured in the second attack was named as Fereydoon Abbasi, another nuclear scientist. His wife was also wounded.

There has been much controversy over Iran's nuclear activities.

Tehran says its nuclear programme is for peaceful energy purposes, but the US and other Western nations suspect it of seeking to build nuclear weapons.

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Iran 'halted enrichment temporarily' says UN watchdog



Iran has denied that the virus had damaged any of its nuclear plants

Iran temporarily stopped enriching uranium earlier in November, according to the UN nuclear watchdog.

The International Atomic Energy Agency gave no reason for the temporary halt in the enrichment of low-grade uranium.

But there was speculation that a complex computer worm which infected the personal computers of staff at the country's first nuclear power station, at Bushehr, might be the reason.

Iran on Tuesday denied that the Stuxnet worm had caused any damage.

The West fears Iran's ultimate goal is to build nuclear weapons. Iran says its programme is aimed solely at peaceful energy use.

'Real problems'

In a report leaked to several news agencies, the IAEA said that none of the centrifuge units at Iran's Natanz plant were being fed for enrichment to lower-levels when inspectors visited the site on 16 November.

On both earlier and subsequent visits more than 4,800 such centrifuges were being fed with nuclear material.

It was not clear whether the technical problems suffered at the plant, which are reported to have included power fluctuations, were due to the computer virus.

One senior diplomat quoted anonymously by Reuters news agency said that Iran was using an old centrifuge model which has been dogged by breakdowns for years.

"I don't think you can necessarily blame Stuxnet entirely. There could be some other issues but clearly they have been having some real problems," the senior diplomat told Reuters.

Cyber experts say the worm, which Iran said in September had attacked its computers, has been configured to damage centrifuges and is capable of seizing control of industrial plants.

Some Western experts have said its complexity suggests it could only have been created by a "nation state". Senior Iranian officials have said that the virus is evidence that an "electronic war" has been launched against the country.

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Stuxnet worm hits Iran nuclear plant staff computers



A complex computer worm has infected the personal computers of staff at Iran's first nuclear power station, the official IRNA news agency reported.

However, the operating system at the Bushehr plant - due to go online in a few weeks - has not been harmed, project manager Mahmoud Jafari said.

The Stuxnet worm is capable of seizing control of industrial plants.

Some Western experts say its complexity suggests it could only have been created by a "nation state".

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“Start Quote

An electronic war has been launched against Iran”

End Quote Mahmoud Liayi Ministry of industries

It is the first sign that Stuxnet, which targets systems made by the German company Siemens,

has reached equipment linked to Iran's nuclear programme.

The West fears Iran's ultimate goal is to build nuclear weapons. Iran says its programme is aimed solely at peaceful energy use.

Stuxnet is tailored to target weaknesses in Siemens systems used to manage water supplies, oil rigs, power plants and other utilities.

'Electronic war'

The fact that Stuxnet has now been detected on the personal computers of staff will have no impact on plans to make the Bushehr plant operational next month, Mr Jafari said.

A team is now trying to remove the malicious software, or malware, from several affected computers, he told IRNA.

It is believed to be the first-known worm designed to target major infrastructure facilities.

"An electronic war has been launched against Iran", Mahmoud Liayi, head of the information technology council at the ministry of industries, told the state-run Iran Daily newspaper.

A working group of experts met last week to discuss ways of fighting the worm, which Mr Liayi said has now infected about 30,000 IP addresses in Iran.