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AFP

Russia calls for NATO probe into Iran cyber strike

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Russia called on NATO on Wednesday to launch an investigation into the computer worm that targeted a Russian-built Iranian nuclear power plant, saying the incident could have triggered a new Chernobyl.

Russia's envoy to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, said the Stuxnet virus caused centrifuges producing enriched uranium at the Bushehr plant to spin out of control, which could have sparked a new "Chernobyl tragedy," the 1986 nuclear meltdown in Ukraine.

"The operators saw on their screens that the centrifuges were working normally when in fact they were out of control," Rogozin told reporters after a regular meeting with ambassadors from the 28-nation Western alliance.

"NATO should get down to investigating this matter," he said, adding that he was interested to know if the German firm which built the centrifuges, Siemens, was probing the matter.

Russia is helping Iran build a nuclear power plant in the southern city of Bushehr for civilian use.

Iran's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency said last week that the Stuxnet attack did not affect the country's nuclear programme, including Bushehr.

"I don't think there will be problems in that area. The Bushehr nuclear power plant will be operational and there will not be a second Chernobyl," ambassador Ali Asghar Soltanieh said during a visit to Moscow.

The New York Times reported last week that US and Israeli intelligence services collaborated to develop the destructive computer worm in a bid to sabotage Iran's efforts to make a nuclear bomb.

US Deputy Defence Secretary William Lynn told reporters during a visit to Brussels this week that there were "ongoing forensics efforts to understand the issues" related to Stuxnet but refused to say more.

In November Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad admitted problems caused by malware, in an apparent reference to the computer virus Stuxnet, but said they had been resolved.

The UN Security Council, of which Russia is a permanent member, has slapped sanctions against Iran over its refusal to freeze its controversial uranium enrichment activities.