

Australia probes spy case at top science authority

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Australian police and intelligence agencies were Tuesday investigating a suspected industrial espionage case at the country's top scientific organisation involving a Chinese national.

The probe reportedly centres on a post-doctoral student who, until last week, worked in the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) highly sensitive nanotechnology laboratory in Melbourne.

Sources told AFP the student was a Chinese national, a revelation that could further test ties with Beijing, which reacted angrily last week when Australia called in China's ambassador over its establishment of an air defence zone in the East China Sea.

"CSIRO became aware of a matter involving an employee suspected of unauthorised use of CSIRO computers," the organisation said.

"We consider this a very serious matter and have referred it to the Australian Federal Police. It is not appropriate for us to release any further details at this time."

The Sydney Morning Herald said a focus of the intelligence probe was to determine whether the man sent CSIRO information to a foreign power.

The organisation's nanotechnology section works closely with Australia's Defence Science and Technology Organisation. CSIRO has also

collaborated with leading Chinese universities on nanotechnology projects in recent years, the Herald said.

Australian intelligence chiefs have spoken publicly this year about the growing threats of industrial espionage and cyber crime, with Chinese hackers accused of stealing the top-secret blueprints of Australia's new intelligence agency headquarters.

In 2011, the computers of the prime minister, foreign minister and defence minister were all suspected of being hacked in attacks reportedly originating in China.

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