

Rogozin Addresses Fire on Sub

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KOMSOMOLSK-ON-AMUR — A senior official hinted Monday that an atomic-powered submarine could have been carrying nuclear weapons when it was engulfed by fire during repairs at a dockyard in December.

Authorities initially said all nuclear weapons aboard the submarine Yekaterinburg had been unloaded well before a fire broke out Dec. 29 and that there was no risk of a radiation leak.

Last week, Vlast quoted Navy sources as saying the submarine was carrying 16 R-29 intercontinental ballistic missiles each armed with four nuclear warheads during the fire, which was set off by welding sparks.

On Monday, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who oversees the defense industry, said that under instructions from 1986, the removal of weapons is not required during minor repairs.

"Was the kind of repair that was being done on the Yekaterinburg such that it required the removal of torpedoes and ballistic missiles?" Rogozin said without answering that question directly.

But he added: "It was not a medium-sized repair. When a boat goes in for medium-sized, capital repair, of course, everything is removed. When a boat goes in and they say we have some small problem, it is never removed."

The fire started when welding sparks ignited wooden scaffolding around the submarine at the Roslyakovo docks, one of the main shipyards used by the Northern Fleet.

The rubber covering of the submarine then caught fire, sending flames and black smoke above the vessel. Firefighters battled the blaze for a day and a night before partially sinking the submarine to douse the flames, according to media reports.

Vlast said Russia had been "on the brink of the biggest catastrophe since the time of Chernobyl," a reference to the 1986 explosion and fire at a nuclear power plant in Soviet Ukraine.

Rogozin, who was in Komsomolsk-on-Amur for meetings on defense-industry and military issues chaired by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, said federal investigators were expected to issue a report Friday on their investigation into the fire.

"We want there to be no doubt in the future about what kind of repair requires the unloading of weapons and what kind of repair does not," Rogozin said.

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