

# US faces growing cyberattacks: USA Today

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The number of reported cyberattacks on US government computer networks rose by more than 40 percent last year, USA Today reported on Tuesday.

The newspaper, citing data obtained from the US Computer Emergency Readiness Team (US-CERT), said there were 5,488 tracked incidents of unauthorized access to US government computers and installations of hostile programs in 2008.

There were a combined 3,928 such incidents in 2007, USA Today said, and 2,172 in 2006.

"Government systems are under constant attack," the newspaper quoted Joel Brenner, counterintelligence chief in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, as saying.

"We're seeing ... a dramatic, consistent increase in cyber crime (and) intelligence activities," Brenner added.

USA Today said more infiltrators were trying to plant malicious software on US government computer systems in a bid to control or steal sensitive data.

The newspaper also said the data obtained from US-CERT may represent only a "small sampling" of the total number of incidents because "just one percent of federal agencies have fully developed tracking systems."

At the same time, some of the increase may reflect better reporting, it quoted Mischel Kwon, who heads US-CERT at the Department of Homeland Security, as saying.

US President Barack Obama last week ordered a sweeping review of US cybersecurity to protect the government's information technology systems from security and economic threats.

The 60-day review is to be overseen by Melissa Hathaway, a former official in George W. Bush's administration who coordinated cyber monitoring for the director of national intelligence.

During the election campaign, Obama equated cyber risks to the threat of nuclear or biological attack and promised a high-level review if he became president.

A congressional panel warned in November that China had developed a sophisticated cyber warfare program and stepped up its capacity to penetrate US computer networks to extract sensitive information.

And a December report by the Commission on Cybersecurity for the 44th Presidency told the new leader that cybersecurity was "among the most serious economic and national security challenges we will face in the 21st century."