

Pegasus spyware

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In news

According to French media nonprofit, Forbidden Stories, and Amnesty International, Pegasus spyware was used to spy on ministers, opposition leaders, journalists and businessmen.

Spying on Indians & others

- India was among the 10 countries where the numbers were concentrated with Mexico topping the list with 15,000 numbers.
- A large share of the numbers was also from West Asian countries such as UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, with Pakistan, France and Hungary being the other prominent countries on the list.
- This is the second time that Pegasus has been linked to phone surveillance.
- In 2019, some WhatsApp users in India, including journalists and activists, were informed that their phones had been compromised.

About Pegasus spyware

- It is Developed by the Israeli cyber arms firm NSO Group.
- The spyware can be covertly installed on mobile phones (and other devices) running most versions of iOS and Android.
- The 2021 Project Pegasus revelations suggest that current Pegasus software is able to exploit all recent iOS versions up to iOS 14.6.
- Pegasus enables the keystroke monitoring of all communications from a phone (texts, emails, web searches).
- It also enables phone call and location tracking, while

also permitting NSO Group to hijack both the mobile phone's microphone and camera, thus turning it into a constant surveillance device.

- The spyware is named after the mythical winged horse Pegasus, it is a Trojan horse that can be sent “flying through the air” to infect phones.
- For instance, the spyware gains **“root-level privileges”**. After this it can view everything from contact lists to messages and internet browsing history and send the same to the attacker.
- Pegasus was discovered in August 2016 after a failed attempt at installing it on an iPhone belonging to a human rights activist led to an investigation revealing details about the spyware, its abilities, and the security vulnerabilities it exploited.



THE PEGASUS PROJECT

- Paris-based media nonprofit Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International accessed a leaked database of thousands of phone numbers across the world targeted by a spyware called Pegasus
- They shared the data with global media organisations as part of a collaborative investigation called Pegasus Project
- An Israeli company called NSO Group makes Pegasus, a spyware capable of extracting data from a phone
- According to the report, at least 2 Union Cabinet ministers, 3 opposition leaders, a Constitutional authority, government officials, scientists and over 40 journalists in India were targeted

Forbidden Stories

- It is a non-profit organization with the mission “to continue and publish the work of other journalists facing threats, prison, or murder.
- It partners with organizations such as Reporters Without Borders and Freedom of the Press Foundation.
- The Forbidden Stories venture was envisioned by Laurent Richard, a French investigative journalist and filmmaker in 2015.

- Forbidden Stories ensures that journalists under threat can secure their information.