

New report alleges widespread Pegasus spying by Israel police

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A smartphone with the website of Israel's NSO Group which features the Pegasus spyware.

Police used Pegasus spyware to hack phones of dozens of prominent Israelis, including a son of former premier Benjamin Netanyahu,

activists and senior government officials, an Israeli newspaper reported Monday.

The bombshell revelation is the latest from the business daily Calcalist, which had previously reported that [police](#) used Pegasus without court authorisation against leaders of an anti-Netanyahu protest movement.

Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai said that "following the recent publications" he had asked Public Security Minister Omer Barlev to establish "an external and independent commission of inquiry, headed by a judge," to probe the allegations.

"To the extent that the commission finds irregularities and failures, they will be dealt with in accordance with the law," Shabtai said in a statement.

Pegasus is a malware product made by the Israeli firm NSO at the centre of a months-long international scandal following revelations that it was used by governments worldwide to spy on activists, politicians, journalists and even heads of state.

Israel had come under fire for allowing the export of the invasive technology to states with poor human rights records, but the Calcalist revelations have triggered a domestic scandal and multiple state investigations.

Prior to Monday's report, the attorney general, state comptroller and the justice ministry's privacy watchdog have all announced probes into the potential use of Pegasus on Israelis.

In its latest report, Calcalist said dozens of people were targeted who were not suspected of any criminal conduct, and without police receiving the necessary court approval.

They include senior leaders of the finance, justice and communication ministries, mayors, and Ethiopian-Israelis who led protests against alleged police misconduct.

In another revelation set to rock Netanyahu's ongoing corruption trial, Calcalist also reported that key witness Ilan Yeshua, former chief executive of the Walla news site, was also target.

Avner Netanyahu, one of the premier's sons, was also on the list. "I truly am shocked," he wrote on Facebook.

Netanyahu is accused of seeking to trade regulatory favours with media moguls in exchange for favourable coverage, including on Walla. He denies the charges.

His lawyers on Monday demanded the trial be halted until the latest revelations were probed.

The trial also suffered a blow last week when multiple Israeli broadcasters reported that police may have used spyware on Shlomo Filber, a former Netanyahu ally turned state witness.

Those reports, which Netanyahu described as an "earthquake", did not mention Pegasus.

Pegasus is a surveillance program that can switch on a phone's camera or microphone and harvest its data.

NSO has consistently denied wrongdoing throughout the multi-stranded Pegasus scandal, stressing that it does not operate the system once sold to clients and has no access to any of the data collected.

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