

Ed Snowden calls for shut down of Israeli Pegasus spyware

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FILE PHOTO. Edward Snowden speaks during an interview in Hong Kong. © Getty Images / Guardian via Getty Images

Moscow, August 4 (RHC)-- France's National Agency for the Security of Information Systems (ANSSI) has confirmed that three French journalists had their devices infected with the Israeli spyware Pegasus. And whistleblower Edward Snowden called the development "enormous."

Traces of the Israeli NSO Group's spyware were found by ANSSI on the phones of Mediapart co-founder and president Edwy Plenel, Mediapart investigative journalist Lénaïg Bredoux, and a journalist at the French state-owned news channel France 24, according to Le Monde.

It marks the first time an official state authority has confirmed the findings of news outlets who reported the spyware last month. ANSSI reportedly informed the Paris public prosecutor of its discovery.

Snowden, whose 2013 leaks revealed the extent of U.S. surveillance programs, described the report as "enormous" on Twitter, arguing, "If they will do it in France, they will do it anywhere. Shut them down—ban the exploit trade."

An unnamed source at France 24 told The Guardian that the company had been "extremely shocked" by the news and was "stupefied and angry that journalists could be the object of spying." "We will not be taking this lying down. There will be legal action," the source added.

India's opposition demands inquiry into alleged govt 'treason' over use of Pegasus spyware
Bredoux also spoke to The Guardian, saying that ANSSI's confirmation "puts an end to the idea that this is all lies and fake news," and is "the proof we need."

A major investigation by 17 news outlets alleged last month that Pegasus had been used by several foreign governments to spy on presidents, human rights activists, journalists, and others.

Le Monde reported that the spyware had been used by Morocco to spy on French President Emmanuel Macron's phone calls – an allegation Morocco has denied – while French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire announced on Friday that state authorities were investigating whether he and other government officials had also been spied on.

Macron's phone number was reportedly discovered by Amnesty International and the French news outlet Forbidden Stories in a database of more than 50,000 phone numbers which were allegedly a "wishlist" of people to be spied on using Pegasus.

Following the bombshell revelation, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz's office declared that his country was "taking the allegations seriously" and that "Israel grants cyber licenses only to nation-states and only to be used for the needs of dealing with terrorism and crime."

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