

Saudi Arabia Denies Pegasus Spyware Allegations: Report

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Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia has dismissed as "baseless" allegations it used Israeli-supplied Pegasus malware to spy on journalists and human rights activists.

"A Saudi official denied the recent allegations reported in media outlets that an entity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia used software to monitor phone calls," the official SPA news agency reported late Wednesday.

"The source added that such allegations are untrue, and that KSA's policies do not condone such practices."

Saudi Arabia was one of a number of governments around the world accused of using Pegasus spyware to monitor the activities of dissidents and other critics, following an investigation by a consortium of media companies, including the Washington Post, the Guardian and France's Le Monde.

Israel's NSO Group and its Pegasus malware -- capable of switching on a phone's camera or microphone and harvesting its data -- have been in the headlines since 2016, when researchers accused it of helping spy on a dissident in the United Arab Emirates.

A giant of Israeli tech with 850 employees, NSO insists its software is only intended for use in fighting terrorism and other crimes, and that any other use is the work of "rogue" operators.

Those claims are rubbished by human rights group Amnesty International.

"NSO's spyware is a weapon of choice for repressive governments seeking to silence journalists, attack activists and crush dissent, placing countless lives in peril," Amnesty chief Agnes Callamard said in a statement.

The UAE normalised its relations with Israel in a US-brokered deal last year, but regional heavyweight Saudi Arabia still has no formal ties with the Jewish state.

- AFP