

# 29 phones tested for Pegasus spyware: SC

Court gives more time to its panel to submit probe report

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The Supreme Court on Friday said its technical committee had so far received and tested 29 mobile devices suspected to be infected by Pegasus malware and gave it four weeks to submit a report to Justice R.V. Raveendran, a retired top court judge overseeing the panel's inquiry into reports that the government used the Israel-based spyware to snoop on journalists, parliamentarians, prominent citizens and even court staff.

Opening the interim report submitted by the committee in court, a Special Bench led by Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana said the committee had developed its own protocol/software to test the devices for malware.

The panel recorded the statements of petitioners, who had approached the court. It has contacted experts and agencies, including those of the government.

The committee has further undertaken a "public consultation exercise" to invite comments on the subject of inquiry. The CJI read out the interim report to lawyers, including senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for the petitioners, and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre.

The interim report said

## Seeking answers

The Supreme Court, which ordered a probe last year into the allegations of **use of Israeli spyware Pegasus by government agencies for targeted surveillance of politicians, journalists and activists**, has asked its technical committee to unearth the following:

**1** Whether Pegasus was used on phones or other devices of the citizens to access data, eavesdrop & intercept information

**2** Details of the victims of Pegasus attack, if any

**3** The steps taken by the government after reports were published in 2019 about hacking of WhatsApp accounts of citizens

**4** If any government agency has used the Pegasus, then under what law



the committee had got a "large number of responses". It was awaiting responses from the agencies.

The committee said its probe would be completed by the end of May. The interim report said the overseeing judge, Justice Raveendran, assisted by two experts, would then require another 15 days to study the panel's recommendations.

The interim report sought an extension till June 20 to complete the exercise and file a comprehensive report before the court. "We will give them time," the CJI told the lawyers, who agreed.

When the parties, including the Union, urged the court to make the interim re-

port public, Chief Justice Ramana proceeded to summarise its contents.

He said the report had divided its court-appointed task into two areas. "One is regarding the inquiry itself. That is, the fact-finding report regarding the technical issues relating to the digital forensic aspects about the reported use of Pegasus malware to target mobiles of Indian citizens. Second is regarding recommendations about the enhancement of existing laws and procedures related to surveillance and securing rights including privacy, cyber security, etc.," the CJI explained.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 10