

DAWN

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Delayed yet again

NOTHING, it seems, can move the federal cabinet to approve of a draft version of the Human Organs and Tissues Transplant Bill so that it can be tabled in parliament and eventually enacted into law. By delaying the matter yet again, the cabinet has failed to heed the Supreme Court's recent advice on urgent transplant legislation. Moreover, it has also closed its eyes to the suffering of thousands of renal patients in the country who could benefit from cadaveric or live voluntary organ donation. The only group who stand to benefit from the endless delay are those unscrupulous doctors, hospital staff and middlemen who are making a killing from the sale of kidneys to mostly foreign patients. The latter, because of strict laws in their own countries, generally have to wait a long time before an organ is available for transplantation. Consequently, they turn to illegal means of procuring a kidney — and in many cases this includes a visit to Pakistan where the absence of legislation has led certain hospitals, mostly in Lahore and Rawalpindi, to offer costly "packaged" services to patients.

The worst sufferers are

those who sell their kidney — usually for a pittance. With a majority of them poverty-stricken or deep in debt, they see this as the only way out of their financial predicament. What they do not realise is that, in the absence of proper post-operative and follow-up care — which most would not be able to afford over a prolonged period — the resulting health complications could mean less productivity at work and restart the cycle of debt and poverty. This makes it all the more necessary to enact comprehensive legislation that would ban the sale and purchase of organs and penalise those who flout the law. With lawmakers dillydallying with the draft bill, the organ mafia — for it is nothing less — is getting stronger by the day. Cases are now coming to light where people have been kidnapped and their kidneys forcibly extracted or where doctors have stealthily removed a patient's kidney while operating on him for another ailment. The cabinet's deferral of the bill is wholly incomprehensible; especially when it knows that unless speedy legislation is made, the damage done will be irreparable.