

## DOCTORS AT TOP INDIAN HOSPITAL CHARGED IN KIDNEY HARVESTING RACKET

**NEW DELHI:** The chief executive, medical director and three other doctors at a prestigious Indian hospital have been charged with offences related to illegal organ transplants after a kidney trafficking racket was uncovered, a police spokesman said.

Operating out of the private L.H. Hiranandani Hospital in Mumbai, the organ harvesting ring was busted by police in July following a tip-off that poor villagers were being paid to sell their kidneys to recipients via a network of agents.

Mumbai Deputy Police Commissioner Ashok Dudhe said the five doctors were arrested late on Tuesday after police had examined the findings of a government inquiry into the case. "Two days ago, we got the report from the director for health services for Mumbai. In this report, there were charges made against these doctors such as negligence under the 1994 Transplantation of Human Organs Act," Dudhe told a news conference on Wednesday.

"They did not follow the procedures laid out, so after receiving the report, we arrested them and brought them before the court." Fourteen people have been arrested so far, he said, including a donor, a recipient and middlemen. Officials at L.H. Hiranandani Hospital did not respond to email requests for comment.

This is the second kidney trafficking racket found operating out of a top Indian hospital in recent months. In June, police discovered a similar racket operating out of the reputable Indraprastha Apollo Hospital in the capital New Delhi.

A shortage of organs for transplants fuels a black-market trade in body parts in India. Commercial trade in organs is illegal in India and only relatives can act as donors. Transplant donations must be approved by a special transplant committee at each hospital.

Police uncovered the racket at L.H. Hiranandani Hospital after a worker informed them of suspicious documentation for a scheduled operation for which a woman was donating a kidney to her husband. They raided the hospital during the operation on July 14, and found the couple were not married and the donor was in fact an impoverished rural woman from the neighboring Gujarat state.

Traffickers allegedly lured poor people from Gujarat into selling their kidneys for about 200,000 rupees (\$3,000) and then re-sold their organs on the black market at a huge profit. Dudhe said the five doctors are charged under a section of the law that holds hospital management responsible for offences committed under their watch. They are also charged for failure to meet the recipient and donor to explain the risks of surgery. "The CEO's job was to meet both the donor and recipient and make the necessary inquiries about them, but he did not do that," said Dudhe.—Reuters

## PAKISTAN APPROVES CYBERCRIME LAW

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan yesterday approved a controversial cybercrime bill the government says will safeguard citizens against harassment and criminalize online child pornography, but which activists say curbs free speech.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill 2016 has been the focus of heated debate over provisions that critics say give the government the power to conduct mass surveillance and criminalize satire.

Fariha Aziz, director of the Bolo Bhi digital rights group, said a section intended to tackle cyber-stalking was drafted in sweeping language that would allow public officials criticized on social media to claim they were being harassed.

It was of particular concern, she said, that the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority would be allowed to ban speech considered "against the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defense of Pakistan".

"This should not be the task of an executive body, this is a matter for the courts," she added.

Gul Bukhari, an activist with the campaign group Bytes for All, said: "It authorizes the state to exchange the private information of citizens with foreign governments or agencies without recourse to any judicial framework."

Defending the bill, IT Minister Anusha Rahman told AFP: "We have built in safeguards against misuse. "It is not as sweeping as it has been made out to be—for most offences, the government will still need to go to court to get a warrant against offenders," adding the only exceptions were child pornography and cyber-terrorism.—AFP



YOGYAKARTA, INDONESIA: This picture taken on May 8, 2016 shows graffiti calling for tolerance.—AFP

## INDONESIA SAYS 'NO ROOM' FOR LGBT RIGHTS MOVEMENT

### UNDER UNPRECEDENTED ATTACK

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia said yesterday there was "no room" for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movement in the country, after Human Rights Watch criticized the government for failing to protect the group that has come under unprecedented attack.

The LGBT community is largely tolerated in Indonesia, especially in urban areas. But LGBT people suffered a sudden public backlash when a central government minister said in January that LGBT people should be barred from university campuses.

The comment "grew into a cascade of threats and vitriol" against LGBT Indonesians, fuelling increased hostility from family and neighbors and fostered stigmatization, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a report released on Thursday.

But the government hit back at the criticism. "As a citizen, whoever the person is will have his rights protected, without looking at his sexual preference," presidential spokesman Johan Budi told Reuters in a text message. "But if LGBT means a mass movement to influence other parties to become like them, then there's no room here."

Dede Oetomo, one of Indonesia's most prominent LGBT activists and founder of LGBT rights group GAYa

NUSANTARA said Budi's remark did not come as a surprise but it showed "the president doesn't understand human rights".

At the height of the anti-LGBT backlash, the authorities banned TV and radio programs from broadcasting LGBT-related information and a minister said the LGBT movement was being used by outsiders to brainwash Indonesians.

An Islamic boarding school for transgender women was also forced to shut down. Kyle Knight, HRW's researcher on LGBT issues, said the authorities' failure to act had created a "social sanction from the highest level" for attacks and hate speech.

#### Shattering taboos

Homosexuality is not illegal in Indonesia, and the barrage of criticism against LGBT has been seen as a test of the country's largely tolerant attitude towards the group. "I don't feel safe with seeing all the 'end LGBT' statements on social media. I feel like a dog," an unidentified 25-year-old gay man interviewed by HRW was quoted as saying in the report.

Some of Indonesia's LGBT activists, however, saw a silver lining to the con-

trovery. Activist Ryan Korbarri, 28, said the backlash which was played out on television and in local newspapers prompted his parents' curiosity about his job with a LGBT rights group. "They did not know what I was doing before, they are more aware now although they tried to persuade me to leave my job. I told them this is the way I live and I will stick with it," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "It used to be a taboo but we openly talk about it now. Many parents did not realize there are so many LGBT people here until then," Korbarri added.

Oetomo of GAYa NUSANTARA said LGBT groups suffered setbacks after the backlash, including difficulties in securing funding for advocacy campaigns but he remained optimistic. "It put things on the table, whether you like it or not, this is a real issue and it gets talked about," he said.

Oetomo however sounded a note of caution, pointing to a petition lodged with Indonesia's top court by anti-LGBT groups to criminalize consensual sex between adults of the same gender. He said if successful, the petition would lead to long term consequences with "another few decades of battle" ahead for LGBT activists wishing to fight any such criminalization.—Reuters