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'Govt considering signing of SOFA with US'

By Staff Correspondent

The government is actively considering signing the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the US government, diplomatic sources said yesterday.

Dhaka is expected to proceed with the signing of the agreement after the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence receive some clarifications from the US side, the sources said.

The agreement will provide for legal cover to movement of US armed forces personnel, military hardware and supplies in times of emergency.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan See Page 12 Col 7

BNP calls half-day countrywide hartal July 16

By Staff Correspondent

BNP has called a half-day hartal across the country on July 16 protesting the government's failure in resolving the power-gas-water crisis, checking the price-spiral of essentials and improving law and order by the July 1 deadline the party gave to the government earlier.

The programme was announced by BNP chief and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia while addressing the participants in the 'mass procession', organised by her party in the city yesterday afternoon. Led by Begum Zia, the procession See Page 12 Col 1

EU bans import of seafood from 50 countries

BRUSSELS, July 1: The European Union today banned the import of fish and other seafood from about 50 countries and territories, saying they provide inadequate information on hygiene standards, reports AP.

Countries affected are mostly poor and not major fish exporters. The move will affect only about one per cent of total EU fish imports, an EU official said.

The biggest fish exporters to the EU on the list were the Dutch Antilles, Vanuatu, Ukraine and Belarus, which together shipped about 12,700 tons of fish to the EU in 1996.

EU fish imports that year totaled three million tons of fish, worth 8.8 billion US dollars.

Passenger trains over BJMB likely from Saturday

By Staff Correspondent

The Bangladesh Railway (BR) is likely to start operating passenger trains over the Bangabandhu Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (BJMB) from Saturday, according to BR officials.

"All obstructions have been removed, and we have received necessary clearance from the JMBA for plying trains over the bridge," said a BR official.

Padma Express will be the first passenger train service over the bridge. The train will start from Rajshahi and terminate at Dhaka. See Page 12 Col 8

Star MAG TOMORROW
Star weekend Magazine's focus this week is on the protagonists of the alternative film movement — Tanvir Mokammel, Morshedul Islam and Tareque Masud.

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Can secondary market sustain four new IPOs at a time?
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Move to redefine loan defaulter 3 months' overdue loans to be classified from Dec

By Inam Ahmed

The government has taken an initiative to redefine a 'loan defaulter' and the Bank Reform Committee has already submitted its recommendations on the issue to the finance ministry.

According to the current practice, a person or a company becomes a defaulter as soon as the loan becomes overdue. But the committee says a loan should be termed defaulted loan only after it becomes classified.

Currently, a loan becomes classified six months after it becomes overdue. However, the Bangladesh Bank, as part of the on-going Financial Sector Reform Programme (FSRP), has decided that a new international standard to classify a loan three months after it becomes overdue will be effective from December this year.

Bankers have generally welcomed this move. But the business circle has sharply reacted to the arrangement. They want that the existing six-month time-frame for an overdue loan to become classified should be extended to one year or implementation of the new international standard should be delayed by at least another year.

The finance minister had already told the businessmen last month that the World Bank would be requested to defer implementation of the new standard for identifying defaulters. Sources said donors are unlikely to agree to deviate from the arrangements of the FSRP.

Meanwhile, the Bank Reform Committee in its recommendations has said that the definition of overdue loan should be the same for both private and public organisations. According to the current practice, loans given to the public sector are not considered as overdue, unlike in case of private sector, as soon as the term of the loan expires. Rather, a six-month time is given for a public sector loan to become overdue.

As per the present practice, continued credit be exempted from being termed overdue if the total amount of interest is paid and if the price of securities on the loans are higher than the amount overdue. But

the committee felt that this system should be cancelled because it can be abused by defaulters.

It also said the Bangladesh Bank should lay down specific rules to evaluate the price of eligible securities like land and buildings to check corruption in price fixing.

The committee also felt that immediate steps must be taken to end misinterpretation of the definition of loan defaulter. It said there is no scope for confusion in the BB definition on overdue loans. However, the committee maintained that it is not logical to use the same definition of loan defaulter in restricting loans to a defaulting company. It said a loanee should not be termed a loan defaulter as soon as the loan becomes overdue. It suggested that a defaulter should be defined on the basis of loan classification, instead of loan overdue.

The committee also supported the BB's effort to introduce a fresh loan classification system in line with international practice. According to See Page 12 Col 3

Europe faces Latino challenge

PARIS, July 1: England hates the penalty shootout. English fans really hate the penalty shootout, reports AP.

For the third time in eight years at a major tournament, soccer's founding nation has fallen victim to a newfangled quirk of the game. The seemingly random arrow of five-kicks-a-side, used to bring an end to endless ties, pointed the other way once again.

To make it worse, the opponent was the longtime rival and political foe Argentina, which

shuffled out of the city's bars, police and citizens were on tenterhooks wondering how the members of the hooligan brigade would take out their frustrations.

The night passed in relative peace. There were a few brawls involving England and Argentine fans, and local youths broke store windows and damaged cars, but it was nothing like the mad violence that surrounded England's match with Tunisia two weeks ago. If anything, the fans walking out of



beat England in the Diego Maradona "Hand of God" game 12 years ago.

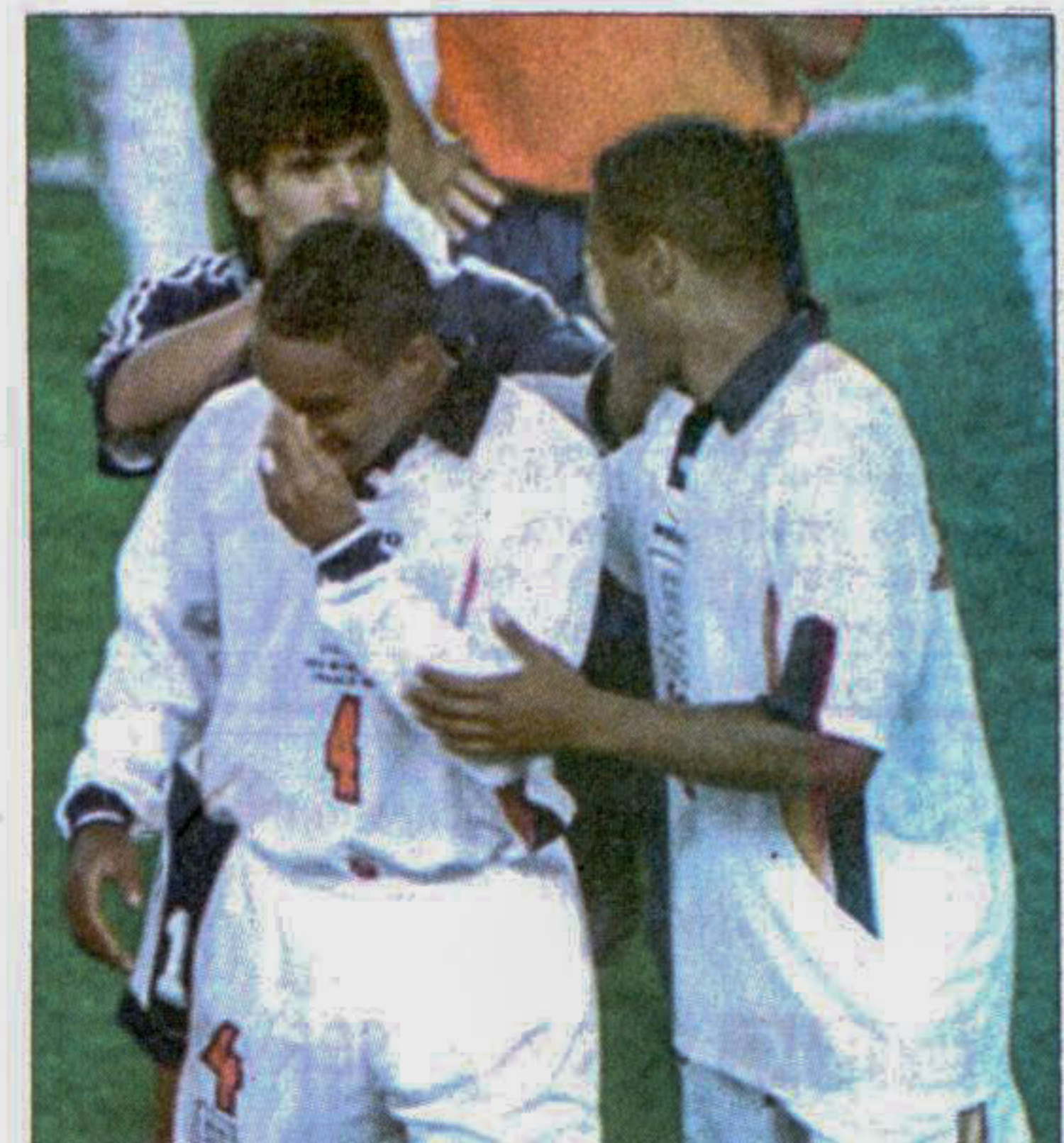
"We are almost distraught," England coach Glenn Hoddle said after Tuesday's loss that sent the Argentines to a quarterfinal match against the Netherlands. "It's a bitter, bitter pill to take... It's a very difficult way to go out of the tournament."

As England's notorious fans with tickets filed out of Saint-Etienne's Stade Geoffroy Guichard and those without

the stadium in Saint-Etienne seemed to depress to rubble.

"Penalties, sad. Penalties, sad," muttered one fan, shaking the shaven head on which he had painted huge red intersecting stripes to represent his country's flag. "The best team went out."

Penalties were also England's curse in the 1990 World Cup semifinals and in the 1996 European Championship semis. Both times, the Germans won the shootouts — and then See Page 12 Col 1



Argentina's Ariel Ortega (C) comes to console a broken hearted Paul Ince (C) after the absorbing second round duel had ended in Saint Etienne on June 30.—AFP photo

BNP brings out 'mass procession' in city Quit power without further delay, Khaleda asks govt

By Staff Correspondent

Thousands of BNP activists led by party chief Begum Khaleda Zia marched through the main thoroughfares of the city yesterday, demanding immediate steps to resolve the water-power-gas crisis, improve law and order and check price-spiral of essentials.

Starting from the Paltan Maidan at 5:30 pm, it took the processionists more than two hours to reach the New Market area, parading about six kilometres. Police halted vehicular movement through the streets through which the procession passed. This caused terrible traffic jams that continued for hours. No untoward incident took place during the march, guarded by riot police.

BNP and its allies had earlier announced the programme for the 'mass procession' to realise the demands.

Addressing the marchers briefly at the Paltan Maidan, Begum Zia also Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad, asked the government to step down and announce a mid-term election because of its 'failure' to resolve any of the problems during its two years of rule.

In her 13-minute speech, the former prime minister lambasted the government for its 'failure' to resolve the water-power-gas crisis, maintain law and order and check price-hike of essentials.

She also charged the government with creating newer problems, multiplying people's sufferings, indulging in corrupt practices and appeasing its 'foreign masters'.

"We'll have to free the people from the clutches of the corrupt, inept, lair and tyrant govern-

France may have to do without Thierry Henry

CLAIREFONTAINE, France, July 1: Preparing to face one of the toughest defenses at the World Cup, France may have to do without top marksman Thierry Henry, reports AP.

Henry, who has scored three goals in the tournament, nursed a sprained left ankle Wednesday and is uncertain to make Friday afternoon's kickoff against Italy at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis.

"I don't know whether he can See Page 12 Col 7

Pak N-scientist flees to US

NEW YORK, July 1: A Pakistani nuclear scientist has fled to the United States and agreed to give information about his country's nuclear programme, saying he is concerned Pakistan might be considering a strike against India, his lawyer says, reports AP.

Ihtakar Chaudhury Khan, 29, is prepared to describe Pakistan's nuclear programme to US officials, including assistance it has received from China and Iran, attorney See Page 12 Col 1



A partial view of BNP's "mass procession" in the city yesterday, led by party chief and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia. —Star photo

Participants at Indo-Bangla Dialogue say Chittagong can emerge as Singapore of South Asia

By Staff Correspondent

Participants at the just concluded Indo-Bangladesh Dialogue underlined the potential of the port city of Chittagong emerging as the Singapore of South Asia.

They said that it could become a financial hub of the region, and that the Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge could provide physical links to the neighbouring countries.

The three-day Indo-Bangladesh dialogue on politics and security that ended in the capital yesterday, addressed

problems relating to enclaves, issues of land, riverine and maritime boundaries, ethnic insurgencies and their cross-border implications.

The speakers also discussed the issues of transit and the development potentials of regional transportation networks and South Asian security.

Summing up the dialogue, Prof Rehman Sobhan, a leading analyst and the executive chairman of the Centre for policy Dialogue, said that there had been useful talks on the in-

surgeries that took place in the CHT and those in the north-eastern Indian states.

"We had deliberations on what led to a settlement," Sobhan said.

Discussions were also held on the potential of the Jamuna Bridge providing greater economic viability not only by linking up different parts of Bangladesh, but also by bridging different countries of the region through the Trans-Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian See Page 12 Col 8

\$250m WB credit for health, population project

The World Bank yesterday announced the approval of a 250 million US dollar credit for a health and population project in the country, reports BSS.

The project will support healthcare reform, expand access to essential services for the poor, reduce the number of infant and pregnancy-related deaths, and improve family planning services, said a World Bank press release.

"Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in the area of health and population. Since the 1970s, the fertility rate has declined by more than half, child immunisation has increased from 10 to 70 per cent, and there has been a substantial decline in the number of infant and child deaths," the release See Page 12 Col 7

said quoting the bank's senior public health specialist Dr Philip Growers.

But Dr Growers pointed out that at the same time, major challenges remain such as the high incidence of pregnancy-related deaths and illnesses, malnutrition, and poverty-related infectious diseases.

The project supports the government's health and population sector programme through technical assistance and funding.

It particularly focuses on improving the coverage and quality of essential health and family planning services for vulnerable groups, particularly poor women and children, reform reorganisation of public See Page 12 Col 7

Non-tribal people in Bandarban refused resident certificates

BANDARBAN, July 1: More than one hundred non-tribal people living in different parts of the district were refused resident certificate by the Deputy Commissioner today.

DC Atiqul Islam told UNB that only those who have land in the district will get the permanent resident certificates. This is the decision of the government, he added.

Each day, scores of non-tribal people from different parts of the district have been thronging the DC's office to collect their permanent resident certificates.

The people having no resident certificate and their children See Page 12 Col 8

7 jailed Myanmar nationals die of AIDS in two yrs

By Mizan Ali

Seven Myanmar nationals, convicted and jailed in Bangladesh, died of AIDS during the last two years, according to the Home Ministry officials.

Officials at the Myanmar embassy in Dhaka, however, declined to comment on the issue saying, "It is beyond our knowledge."

Two more Myanmar nationals, also prisoners, have been detected with AIDS. They are undergoing treatment at the city's Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH), the sources said, without giving further details.

Health Ministry sources said, a total of 102 HIV positive cases have been identified in the country till June this year.

Of the total HIV positive patients reported in the country, 10 had developed full-blown AIDS. Among the patients, seven had already died while three others were undergoing medical treatment.

"When a foreign prisoner is identified as an AIDS patient, we immediately inform the concerned government and make a request to take him back at the earliest," said an official.

Sources at the IDH said that the victims were provided symptomatic treatment. "The retroviral treatment, which is needed in such cases, however, is very expensive," a source said. According to him, expenses for retroviral treatment per patient a year may go upto 30,000 US dollars.

A Home Ministry source said that in case a victim dies of AIDS, information is sent immediately to the government concerned, requesting them to take back the body.

"If no reply is received even after waiting for a few days we carry out the burial process in accordance with the rituals of the respective religion of the deceased," the source said.

According to the Home Ministry officials, a total of about 300 Myanmar nationals are serving prison terms mainly on charges of illegal border crossing. The majority of them are kept in jails of the Chittagong range.

Hundreds of pvt labs, no guidelines Many run without registration, even qualified pathologists

By Naimul Haq

Private pathological laboratories in the country have been operating without any government guidelines.

The Medical Practice and Private Clinics and Laboratories (Regulation) Ordinance, 1982 merely defines a 'private laboratory' but does not state anything about how a laboratory should function and what are the prerequisites for obtaining registration.

A list in Schedule 'A' of the ordinance specifies the rates of fees for various investigations. The ordinance also mentions that a register must be maintained and written acknowledgment of receiving fees is to be issued to the patients.

According to sources in the Directorate of Health Services, there are 575 registered laboratories in the city. But the unofficial figure is at least three times that figure.

Due to lack of proper guidelines on how pathological investigations should be conducted, owners of the diagnostic

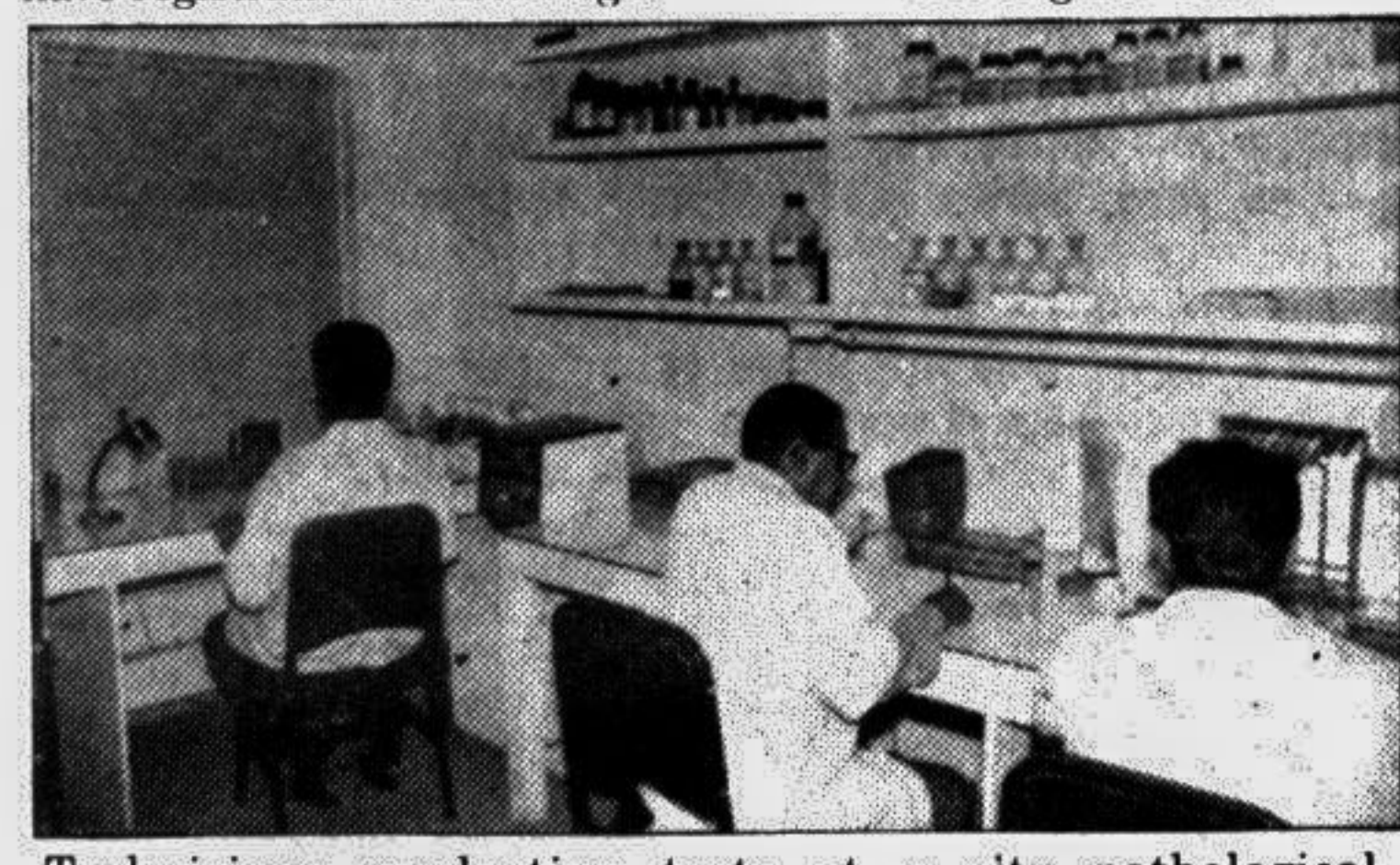
centres have been doing booming business taking advantage of the loopholes in the law.

During an investigation by this correspondent last week, it was found that a large number of city diagnostic centres do not have registration or their regis-

tration expired long ago and they have been continuing business without renewing it.

It was also found that a number of diagnostic centres had no qualified pathologist or lab technician.

See Page 12 Col 4



Technicians conducting tests at a city pathological laboratory. —Star photo

The Daily Star
World Cup Quiz '98
DRAW OF ROUND-8
TODAY
5pm Jatiya Press Club
Guests Include
Ace footballer **Alfaz Ahmed**
Ace footballer **Rakib Hossain**
Veteran journalist **Shahadit Chowdhury**
Eminent sports journalist **Azam Mahmood** and
Noted singer **Shakila Zafar**
You are most cordially invited
And Remember
Round-9 begins from today
See the Sports Page NOW!