Drought fear looms

less over the last three months

compared to the past few years.

BMD, however, recorded a tolerable

10 per cent less rainfall in Khulna,

show up in our skies or in the

upstream of Bangladesh from which

we would have benefited," said an

expert of BMD requesting anonym-

"Instead, monsoon clouds

moved towards countries like

Myanmar, parts of India and

Thailand where severe flooding was

Lack of natural flood flow and

rainfall might trigger a drought in the

coming months, warned both the

experts at FFWC and BMD. It might

also severely affect fish farming

throughout the northern regions

where fish is cultivated in ponds and

wetlands, where water is currently

lying at the lowest level. Flooding is

reported recently," said the expert.

"The monsoon simply did not

Barisal and Sylhet.

Tk 3,000 minimum wage

government will not implement minimum wage for the workers.

They warned of a fresh unrest in garment sector if the government does not announce a minimum wage of Tk 3,000 for workers of the sector and ensure implementation

Jatiya Sramik Federation organised the workers' convention held at the Institution of Engineers.

Renowned economist Abul Barkat, general secretary of Bangladesh Economic Association said minimum wage for garment workers will not be announced by the present government since it is not pro-worker, and did not take initiatives for the welfare of workers during the last five years.

In 1994, the government had fixed Tk 930 as minimum wage, which was not proper. Considering the 1994 minimum wage, it should be at least Tk 2,511 because prices of essentials have increased 2.7 times during the last 11 years, he pointed out.

Now, minimum wage should be Tk 3.000 while workers demand Tk 4.000 and owners of factories agree to provide Tk 1.350, the economist

Wajedul Islam Khan, general secretary of Trade Union Kendra, mentioned that the government signed an agreement with Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (Skop), a platform of workers organisations, on January 8 in 2004. The agreement provided that minimum wage would be implemented within four months but it is yet to be done, he

Roy Romesh Chandra, general secretary of Jatiya Sramik League, said the proposed minimum wage announced on July 8 in 2001 was Tk 1,200 for small factories, Tk 1,250 for medium factories and Tk 1,350

He expressed his surprise that a minimum wage of only Tk 1,350 for garment workers is under consideration while a night guard gets Tk 3.000 a month.

Hasanul Haq Inu, president of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, said the Minimum Wage Board (MWB) now covers only 70,000 workers of 38 sectors, who constitute less than 25 percent of the total number of workers in the country.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon chaired the convention, and speakers included General Secretary of the party Bimal Biswas, central leader Haider Akbar Khan Rono, workers leaders Nurul Islam, Jakir Hossain, Mesbah Uddin Ahmed, Abdul Kader Hawlader, Aminul Islam Golap, Abdus Sattar, Nur Ahmed Bakul and Saleha

also vital for replenishing the soil with alluvial deposits on the fields. The experts said due to lack of Jute workers flood and rainwater, the level of groundwater will not be replenished and a drought will occur in the bring out a protest procession with coming months, making it more difficult for farmers to irrigate their

> They said the authorities should prepare for supplementary irrigation facilities in vulnerable areas like Rajshahi and Chittagong regions, where the drought might be severe. In Rajshahi a persisting poor rainfall has already caused severe damage to Aman cultivation, according to a newspaper report.

Selim Bhuiyan said usually during June, July and August the and the Meghna -- are flowing up to four metres below the danger level. At this stage even if there is more rainfall, the rivers have less chance of overflowing since water levels in all the water basins in the country are already extremely low.

"If you analyse the severe flooding in 1987, 1988 and 1997 you will find that those reached their peaks between the months of August and September. But in those years, by mid-July water levels in the rivers were already touching the danger level." said an expert of FFWC.

Meanwhile, a special munajat Mukarram mosque in the capital already caused serious setback for

Last week thousands of people took part in similar prayers at hundreds of mosques across the north-

JP, internal feud regarding taking decisions about its

hurt if the grassroots level leaders leave their constituencies fearing that their opponents will descend on them in retaliation, taking the opportunity of BNP not being in power.

Party leaders and activists will sit today to find out an effective strategy to win the next general election. The party high command decided to take oninions from the grassroots level leaders on the issue of Jativa Partv's probable inclusion in the alliance so that they can be inspired to work together to ensure victory in the election, BNP sources said. "Party leaders will talk about the

next election which will be helpful for us to win it," BNP Standing Committee Member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain told reporters vesterday. "Leaders and activists may also give their suggestions on expansion of the alliance," he said. They may also talk about organi-

sational activities as well as party discipline," he added. The NEC meeting, seen as prepa-

ratory to the next general election scheduled to be held in January next year, will focus on preparing an election manifesto, latest political situation and organisational work all over the country.

According to the programme schedule, Khaleda will sit in a closed door meeting with the grassroots level leaders after the inaugural session. The media will not be allowed access to the closed door session.

In the meantime, preparation to make the NFC meeting a success has been completed. Last night BNP Secretary General also LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan sat with the party lawmakers elected from Dhaka city. They discussed the matter as well as making successful brate the 28th founding anniversary of the party on September 1.

Party sources said BNP high command will not allow the grassroots level leaders to criticise the party's recent move to include JP in the alliance and the rebellious roles of some senior leaders like Col (retd) Oli Ahmad as the senior leaders think that such discussions will boost internal feuds which could be harmful for the electoral preparation.

"Now we don't want to give importance to the rebel leaders as the senior leaders of the party already took initiatives regarding them." a senior leader told The Daily Star.

However Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, who is also the health and family planning minister said, "The leaders may raise the issue."

The standing committee of the party has been learnt to have decided on August 22, to maintain a slow pace defiant leaders including Oli Ahmed, while Khaleda talked to Jamaat leaders about the overthrown military ruler Ershad's return to the alliance. Ershad is now the most important issue for BNP as Jamaat is opposing the move to include JP in the alliance.

Leaders and activists think that the NEC meeting is crucial as some party ministers' and lawmakers' fates depend on the meeting's outcome and the party chairperson's decision on JP's probable inclusion in the alliance will also depend on the outcome. So BNP senior leaders are taking the meeting seriously.

US rallying allies partners on Iran Russia rules out

sanctions for now AFP, REUTERS, Kennebunkport/

US President George W. Bush on Thursday led a US diplomatic effort to ensure a united response to Iran's nuclear programme one week before Tehran may face United Nations

Bush telephoned the leaders of Germany and Italy, while US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called her Russian and German counterparts as well as EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, US officials

Iran appears headed for a showdown with the UN Security Council, which is expected to use an August 31 meeting to take up Tehran's refusal to freeze uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities as demanded by world powers.

"There is still time before August 31 for Iran to comply," US State Department acting spokesman Gonzalo Gallegos told reporters. "We encourage Iran to make the right

The United States and other world powers have reacted coolly to Iran's response to a package of incentives offered by the five permanent Security Council members and Germany colloquially known as "P5 plus one" -in return for a moratorium on sensitive uranium activities "Their response fell short." White

House spokeswoman Dana Perino told reporters as Bush travelled here to his parents' oceanside compound for a weekend family wedding. "Security Council Resolution 1696

has the deadline of August 31st, and so the members of P5 plus one are going to be discussing and communicating amongst themselves, reviewing the response from Iran and then meeting on August 31st, as spelled out in that resolution, as well," said

clubs and iron rods at Khalishpur as part of their movement in protest against violation of agreement reached on May 28 at Khulna Circuit House between the government and the parishad with Jute Minister Shajahan Siraj as the main media-

The Patkal Sangram Parishad backed by Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal's industrial wing had announced in last May a donation of five lakh taka for the family of a worker or employee who would immolate himself in the movement for realising their demands

Amid mounting tension ahead of August 27 and 29 programmes and announcement of self-immolation by aggrieved jute mill workers and employees, over 20 platoons of security forces have been deployed at the sensitive points of Khulna-Jessore industrial belt to prevent possible violence Khulna Metropolitan Police

Commissioner Khan Saeed Hasan said he has appealed to the Patkal Sangram Parishad leaders to observe their programmes peacefully while the parishad convener Sarder Motaharuddin warned of a Kansat-like situation in case of any police excesses to foil the move-

7 outlaws

FROM PAGE 1 he will face dire consequences for

his action, the ASP said Police said the arrested outlaws

might have been involved in the killing of Tala upazila BNP president Altaf and district Matsajibi Dal president Jewel. They said the outlaws were also

involved in anti-social activities in the town and its adjoining areas.

A case was filed against the seven with Sadar Police Station under the Speedy Trial Act.

Jute growers

The Daily Star correspondent at Ghugudoher beel (marshy land) expressed happiness over the increase of price of jute fibre.

Besides, jute sticks, used as firewood and for fencing, is also selling at higher prices, they said.

As jute cultivation has become more profitable than the cultivation of paddy, this year the enthusiastic farmers cultivated jute on more lands than they did in the previous years, farmers said.

During visits in the district, this correspondent found vast areas under jute cultivation. At some places, jute plants have already been harvested and the new fibre has also started coming in the Although happy with the rise in

jute price, the farmers said they do not get the price declared by the government owned iute mills.

The government-owned Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) fixed Tk 1200 per maund of jute for buying from the farmers but the jute traders at the local market do not give them the price on various pretexts, farmers said.

Instead of directly buying from the farmers. the traders buy jute from their nominated middlemen, said iute farmer Abdul Karim.

Around 50 lakh bales of jute are expected to be produced in the country this year, BJA sources said, adding that around 30 lakh bales will be consumed in the local mills and factories and the rest will be exported. Nearly 70 per cent of jute has already been harvested.

Now around 10 lakh acres of land in the country are under jute cultivation while around 60 per cent of high quality jute is produced in Pabna and Faridpur districts, sources said.

Outlaws kill

police reached the scene at 8:30pm. No other senior officials however visited the spot as of filing this report at 9:00pm

Eleven outlaws were shot dead and five policemen were injured during a gunfight between police and the PBCP operatives at Sarir Bhita-Nakharaj village of Sujanagar upazila in the district on August 17.

rivers, canals and flood plains of the country are full of water, sometimes going over the danger level. But this year all the three major rivers -- the Padma (Ganges), the Brahmaputra

Experts said chances of even a moderate flood are very slim.

(prayer) was offered at Baitul yesterday seeking blessings from the Almighty so that the country's northern region could see an adequate rainfall, want of which has cultivation of Aman and other crops

Genuine voters

Rohingya refugees on the list might have exceeded 7.000 mark, the sources claimed A Daily Star investigation found

that the number of voters in the constituency of a state minister marks a significant rise. District Awami League (AL)

General Secretary Shalauddin Ahamed alleged that over 10,000 loyalists of his party were left out of Zafar Alam, chairman of Chakoria Municipality, and Abdur

Municipality, alleged that BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami leaders had influenced the enumerators to enrol a large number of Rohingyas in the voter list. Teknaf upazila BNP President Mostague Ahmed Chowdhury said a small number Rohingvas might

Rahman Bodi, chairman of Teknaf

have been included as voters, but the number is not as big as claimed by the opposition leaders. Maheshkhali upazila AL President Anwar Pasha said that some 8,000 supporters of his party

were dropped from the updated For instance, he named some Rohingyas who have been registered as voters. They are Noor Mohammed, Ali Ullah, Ziaur Rahman, Nurul Amin, Mohammed Taher, Mohammed Idris and

Shajeda Begum.

He said he has lodged a complaint with the local election officer in

Asrafa Yusuf, a housewife and a voter in Ukhiva, said none of her family members was included in the voter list although they had filled in the forms designated for inclusion in the roll. Abdur Rahim, president of

Ukhiya Press Club, also claimed that none of his family members has been registered as voters. Helenaz Tahera, commissioner

of Cox's Bazar Poursabha, complained that many of his relatives have been left out of the updated The additional election officer of

the district said about 80 per cent of the work has already been completed and a total of 1.834 assistant officers, mostly primary school teachers, were engaged in the process. A total of 1,25,183 people have

been listed as voters whereas 7.408 names were corrected and 5, 979 deleted, he added. Number of newly listed voters

stands at 1,79,880 in Cox's Bazar district, raising the number of voters to 11.20 lakh from 10,28,399 in the list prepared in 2001.

No specific charges

recovered bomb-making materials and training equipment from a remote Jamia Islamia Nurul Ulum Qawami Madarasa at Jibontola village of Bhaluka upazila in Mymensingh. The militants tried to swoop on the

elite crime busters carrying out the raid, said a Rab official after the raid. Rab officials said the bomb-making materials bore strong resemblance to

the ones seized earlier from different parts of the country. They also claimed that three of the arrestees admitted that they had been receiving military training at the

Jibontola den. On reason for not filing a case against them. Bhaluka police said they are waiting for reports confirming whether the materials seized were explosives

"I have been pressing repeatedly for confirmation but to no avail. The Directorate of Explosives and Criminal Investigation Department have yet to send us the reports," Sub-Inspector Rabiul Islam of Bhaluka Police Station, who is currently investigating the matter, told our district correspondent.

On the contrary, Officer-in-Charge (OC) Mizanur Rahman of Bhaluka said he has received reports on two out of the three specimens he sent for confirmation. The reports confirmed that the seized materials could be used in bomb making. He yesterday told The Daily Star

that the interrogation is going on and police would lodge two cases -- one under arms and the other under explosives acts-- shortly after getting the nod from his superiors. Significant leads have been

obtained during interrogation of the arrestees, he claimed. Two prospective suicide bombers

and a veteran of the Afghan war, Mufti Abdur Rouf, are among the militants now detained in Mymensingh jail. Police first placed seven of them on a 10-day remand each. Later, four more - Abul Hossain. Omar Farug,

Mohibullah, and Ibrahim -- were

remanded after their names came up

in the information obtained from the

Rabiul said he would bring another militant Sumon for interrogation as his name too has come up lately.

Meanwhile, police also did not bring any charge against Munshi Nuruddin Haider, the founder of the madrasa who was arrested the same day in an extortion case "Munshi, now in jail, fronts the

managing committee of the madrasa and he might have links to the militant activities," the OC said adding that they may bring a charge against him The arrestees include Abdur Rouf.

Kazi Nurul Alam Siddique, Tofazzal Hossain, Ibrahim Khalil, Anwar Hossain, Safavet Hossain, Masudur Rahman, Jamal, Sahabuddin, Mahmudul Hassan Sumon, Nizamuddin, Afzal Hossain, Ershad Hossain, Arshaduzzaman, Abdul Quiyyum, Tofazzal Hossain, Saiful Islam, Abdul Hannan, Omar Farug, Mohammad Ibrahim, Mohibulla, Maksudur Rahman, Mohammad Quamruzzaman, Yasin, Mir Hossain and Nuruddin Haider. Rouf, 42, had been arrested sev-

eral times before in Faridpur and Cox's Bazarin 1993 and 1995.

Hasan Azizul Haque FROM PAGE 1

life and works of poet Shamsui

Describing poet Rahman as "an icon of Bangla literature", Hasan Azizul Haque said, "Shamsur Rahman's love for the rural utopia and independence of the country will lead us."

The other speakers criticised the government for not arranging proper treatment for the poet.

Poets Zulfikar Matin and Anik Mahmud, Gono Khabor Editor Mahtab Uddin, freedom fighter Abul Bashar, columnist Shafiqul Islam, Rajshahi Rakkha Sangram Parishad Convenor Jamat Khan. iournalists Mustafizur Rahman Khan Alam and Rafiq Alam addressed the meeting presided over by Shafiqul Islam, acting president of Rajshahi Metropolitan

there under a UN Security Council resolution that led to the August 14 ceasefire between Israel and

Hezbollah after a 34-day conflict. "Syrian suggestion that (UN) forces assisting the government of Lebanon to secure its borders would somehow be a hostile act or threat to Syria is preposterous," State Department spokesman Gonzo Gallegos told reporters. It is matter of international law

under the UN Security Council resolution that all countries must obey the arms embargo, he said.

"It is a singular duty for Syria as the one country, apart from Israel, that borders Lebanon to do so," he said.
"We call on the Syrian regime to

fulfil its international obligations and

respect and abide by UN Security Council resolutions that reflect the

unanimous consensus of the international community," Gallegos said. UN Security Council Resolution 1701 calls on Lebanon "to secure its borders and other entry points to prevent the entry in Lebanon without its consent of arms," and Lebanese troops have reportedly deployed along

Washington and Israel accuse Syria of acting as a transit point for shipments of arms and other supplies from Iran to Hezbollah.

the Syrian border in the north and east

of the country.

Iran and Syria deny the claim

Manzurul murder FROM PAGE 16

while observing the third death anniversary of the AL leader. Manzurul was killed in a bomb attack on the morning of August 25, 2003 in front of his house at Shamsur Rahman road under Khulna Sadar upazila.

Khulna AL held a condolence meeting at Ward-16 in front of the ancestral home of the slain leader Lawmaker and City Al President Talukder Abdul Khaleque, President of the Khulna District AL Shaikh Harun-ar-Rashid, City AL Secretary Mizanur Rahman and former lawmaker Begum Mannujan Sufian addressed the meeting.
AL organised different

programmes to observe the day including the hoisting of national and black flags on party offices wearing black badges, placing floral wreath at his portrait, mourning rally in city, offering of fateha at his grave, milad mehfil and discussion meet-Speakers at the meeting said

both AL and members of Manjurul's family rejected the charge sheet as it did not have the names of the 'godfathers and financiers' of the

Hasına

FROM PAGE 16

London in 1969 with my father. He told me that an election will be held in the country [the then Pakistan] in 1970 and Bangalees will win but the Pakistani forces will not hand over power. Afterwards, a war of liberation will begin and we will win in the

It was the farsightedness of Bangabandhu that led to the country's independence, the AL chief

"The independence came with a vision to bring in changes to the fate of the poor, but most people of the country still live in poverty and suffer malnutrition. This was not the vision of freedom." Hasina said. calling upon the people from all walks of life to work to ensure their fundamental

Army man

FROM PAGE 16 scheduled to start today, family sources said.

As Shajahan was taking a turn near the Balaka office of Bangladesh Biman, a Tongi-bound speeding minibus collided with the bike, police said.

the bike and the bus ran over them, leaving them dead on the spot. Meanwhile, the bike caught fire and the two bodies were also partly

Both the father and son fell from

burnt. The bodies lav on the road for about an hour before an ambulance

carried them to the Combined

Military Hospital. Shajahan Ali had recently returned from UN peacekeeping mission abroad and is on LPR now, family sources said.

No crisis of diesel

FROM PAGE 16 According to sources, BPC also had sufficient stocks of other fuels. At present BPC's reserves of furnace oil and kerosene stands at 46,000 tons and 41,000 tons. Enough for 40 days and 28 days of supply respectively.

The reserve for petrol and

octane together stands at 30,000 tons to meet demands for the next 50 days. The BPC has reserves of 15,500

tons of jet A1 (fuel for aeroplanes) which is sufficient for 31 days of "In fact, there is no crisis of

diesel or any other fuel in the country," the BPC officials claimed. They blamed a vested quarter for creating the reported crisis in connivance with a section of officials and employees working at BPC depots for personal gains. A number of 'so called journal-

ists' were also involved in this evil practice and spreading rumours about fuel crisis to serve the interests of a vested quarter, they further alleged adding that it was also damaging the image of the country's oil sector.

US warns Syria An ugly alliance On Page 16 An ugly alliance

FROM PAGE 16

recruited the former army chief's party to its alliance. In the last election, the BNP and its allies gained a two-thirds majority. This election is expected to be much closer. If Mr Ershad repeats his performance in the last election (14 seats and 7% of the vote) he could be the "queenmaker" in the fourth bitter contest between the prime minister, Khaleda Zia and the Awami League's leader, Sheikh Hasina Wajed. Mr Ershad and Mrs Zia are, largely because of their closeness to the armed forces, seen as natural allies. By recruiting Mr Ershad, Mrs Zia has greatly improved her chances of winning the poll.

end Mr Ershad's rule, the BNP has

Other potential losers from the pact are the BNP's two Islamist coalition partners, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oitya [Islami Oikya Jote]. The League, and some anxious foreign observers, have accused the BNP of tolerating Islamic extremism because of its ties to these parties. A bombing campaign, blamed on banned militant groups, whose existence the government has earlier denied, died down earlier this year, after the arrest of the two main groups' leaders. But suspicions persist that Bangladesh is a base for international terrorism.

The BNP is divided over Islamism, but it needs Jamaat-e-Islami, which is very popular. It has therefore tried to burnish its Islamist credentials. This week, a government minister named a new bridge in southern Bangladesh after Hizbullah. "because of our love for the Lebanese resistance group.' But the alliance with Mr Frshad may

be a step towards sidelining the Islamists. That would help the government woo the foreign donors relies on, and might improve fraying relations with India, which has not ruled out Bangladeshi involvement in last month's bomb-

ings in Mumbai Whatever the implications for the Islamic parties, the deal with Mr Frshad is not an advertisement for Bangladeshi democracy. The BNP negotiated the pact through Mrs Zia's son, Tareque, a wealthy businessman. Mr Ershad spent six years in prison on corruption charges in the 1990s. He is currently out on bail, facing 17 pending charges; dropping these appears to be part of his price for joining the alliance. The law minister said the decision is up to the courts, but he was widely disbelieved.

At the end of October, the ruling coalition is due to hand power to a caretaker government to oversee the poll. The League's 14-party opposition alliance has already organised anti-BNP street protests. If the past is any guide, political violence will rise as the elections approach. The opposition is threatening to boycott them unless the caretaker system is reformed. It says the prospective chiefs of the caretaker government and election commission are partisan appointees who must be replaced by neutrals. But so polarised is Bangladesh politics, neutrals are tough to find.

BDR, BSF

Maj Humayun, second in command of 41 rifles battalion of BDR, confirmed the incident and said as BSF had fired four shots at the BDR camp, they retaliated. He also said the Indian border

guards also fired shots targeting BDR personnel at Bhomra and Baikari border areas under Sadar upazila on August 23 and 24. Meanwhile, The Daily Star staff correspondent from Sylhet reported

that residents of at least 15 villages near Atgram, Biabail, Uttarkul and Amolshid border areas under Zakiganj upazila have yet to return to their homesteads as a tense situation has been prevailing in the area for the last 3 days following wounding of a Bangladeshi farmer by BSF firing on Tuesday. The Indian border guards

removed the red flags from the zero line along Biabail border on Thursday evening and stopped warning Bangladeshi farmers through loudspeakers not to cultivate the farmlands adjacent to the border. But. BSF started the same practice at the Uttarkul border

creating a panic among the neighbouring villagers. BSF also did not reply to the August 22 letter sent to it by BDR. The Bangladeshi border security force in that letter protested BSF's firing on Bangladeshi farmers on Tuesday. It also requested a flag meeting immediately. Panic among the villagers at the

border has been rising as BSF has

been deploying additional forces

along Atgram, Biabail, Uttarkul and

Amolshid border areas and

because of the repeated BSF warn-

ings to the villagers, over the last

and secondary schools in the area have been suspended. Asaduddin, the septuagenarian wounded by Tuesday's BSF firing, was admitted to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical

College Hospital, His family mem-

close to the border.

few days, not to cultivate the lands

Academic activities at primary

bers are going through hardships due to a financial crisis. Asad's treatment is also being hampered, his family members alleged. BDR and BSF, at a flag meeting held in the Indian territory on Wednesday, agreed to maintain a peaceful atmosphere at the border. Both the sides also agreed to maintain the status quo of the border lands as well as to follow the 1974 border agreement. The meeting was held following a

qunfight between the neighbouring

border security forces involving

over 4000 rounds of bullets and

several hundred mortar shells on August 9 and 10. About 15,000 villagers were compelled to leave their houses following the gunfight. Teenage soldier

2004, when he cut his wrists in his "The army is greatly saddened by the death of Kingsman (Private) Chelsea," a spokeswoman for the

Ministry of Defence told AFP. "The thoughts and sympathies of all its soldiers are with his family and friends at this very difficult time."

"There are going to be investigations into this incident ... and until they are complete, we can't comment any further."

15,000 UN troops

being deployed in the south.

The UN-backed truce took effect on August 14 after 34 days of fighting which cost the lives of nearly 1,200 people in Lebanon, mostly civilians, and 157 Israelis, mainly soldiers.

Israel wants the beefed-up UN force to move to the border before it withdraws fully from Lebanon. It also has vowed to keep its partial sea and air blockade on Lebanon until the force deploys on the Syrian border to prevent Hezbollah from rearming.

Chirac said the blockade was "extremely prejudicial to the economy and life in Lebanon, and in my view quite uniustified.' Lebanon said on Thursday it

would seek technical assistance from Germany to help control the border with Syria, but had no immediate plans to ask Unifil to deploy soldiers there.

Syria threatened a day earlier to close the border if UN troops were sent there.

"At the moment we are seeing some very unconstructive signals from Syria," Germany's Merkel said. She said Syria was not helping to resolve the conflict between Israel

and Hezbollah, but should in the long term be included in any political process to settle it. EU countries had initially hesitated about sending troops into a danger zone between Israel and Hezbollah guerrillas. But say new

rules of engagement for Unifil have Questions remain over the leadership of the force, with France saying Unifil's current French com-

mander would stay in his post, and Italy proposing a dual command under which it could also take a leadership role from New York. In a sharp public rebuke over his

handling of the war in Lebanon, a

poll published on Friday showed 63

percent of Israelis want Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to resign. The Yedioth Aronoth poll showed for the first time a majority favoured Olmert quitting, along with a surge in support for the rightwing Likud party

and its leader Benjamin Netanyahu. Olmert, a career politician who lacks the combat credentials of many of his predecessors, has seen his public standing plummet for failing to deliver a fatal blow to Hezbollah.

Israel has also pursued an offensive against Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, where hospital officials said eight people were wounded on Friday in air strikes on the home of a Palestinian militant and what the army said was a weapons depot.

The Israeli army has been trying

to force the release of an Israeli

soldier seized by militants from Gaza on June 25. There has been no word on the fate of Corporal Gilad Shalit, but the

Hamas-led Palestinian government said progress was being made toward the release of a Fox News correspondent and cameraman seized by gunmen in the Gaza Strip

2nd gold for Bangladesh

waiting to see their star shine. A small national flag was found and Mahfuz started running with it before embracing his coach, both showing tears of joy. "I had faith in this boy. He has

done me proud. Our target was to

finish the race in at least 14.28

seconds but that would have not

to spark celebrations among the

Bangladeshi athletes eagerly

won him gold. He has done better and I give him full credit," the emotionally drowned coach Kitab Ali told reporters after the victory. Mahfuz, who showed no nerves in spite of high expectation of his colleagues, told after the race that he was proud to become the first athlete to win a hurdles gold for the

"My preparation was satisfactory and like my coach, I was confident about my timing at home although it was clocked manually. The only doubt I had was because I never got the chance to know my actual electronic timing before this meet." said the only brother of five sisters and the youngest son of a retired farmer from the village of Anantapur, Begumganj. "Naturally, I was a bit tensed

because it was my first exposure to an international meet. The Pakistani duo was good but I concentrated hard since my arrival in Colombo.

Mahfuz, a trainee at the months.

best to get accustomed to the

condition. It was not difficult. dler Liu Xiang. It was Bangladesh's second

gold medal at the 10th South Asian

"We need more facilities and exposure if we have to improve our

Bangladesh Air Force for just six home to concentrate on this race. Now I am free and want to call home to share the joy. I tried my

first coach Rafiqullah Akhter Milon in Noakhali at this moment. And of course my present coach Kitab sir. who has trained me with care. And mv sister Roksna Yasmin Fahima too, who being an athlete, inspired me to join the track," said Mahfuz whose model is China's ace hur-

Games after Shahjahan Ali Rony won the men's 50m breaststroke event on Wednesday. Aside from Mahfuz's heroics, Sumita Rani Das and Fouzia Huda

Jui won silver medals for

Bangladesh in women's 100m

hurdles and long jump.

performance in future," said "I haven't talked to anyone at

"I remember my family and my