

during the third re-tender found Harbin's experience inadequate. The bid criteria wanted the winning contractor to have 10 years of experience of designing, inspecting, building, supplying, testing and commissioning at least one 90 MW power plant outside the country of its origin. Harbin disqualified in all those counts, but nothing stopped it from getting the contract.

The same pattern of awarding projects to disqualified bidders violating all kinds of laws and ignoring the country's interest was adopted in the gas sector too. That Niko, a Canadian gas exploration company was badly wanting in both experience and capability, was exposed beyond doubt after two huge blowouts in Tengratila at the gap of only six months, burning about 260 billion cubic feet of gas. The fire at Tengratila is not expected to extinguish until December. According to news reports, the incidents exposed shady deals giving Niko undue benefits. The blowout in Magurchhara that burned 265 billion cubic feet of gas can also be remembered as another example of questionable deals that allowed Unocal, the offending company, to go without paying any compensation whatsoever.

The four-party alliance government is also guilty of giving the culture of politicisation a new dimension in its four years tenure. Starting from appointment of judges to the high court to the selection of 150 former JCD leaders as Upazila Elections Officers, the government has broken all records of politicisation. The opposition parties believe, and not implausibly, that these two incidents were done to manipulate the next general elections due in 2007.

**H**OW has the BNP-led alliance government fared in the economic sector? With a steady five to six percent Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, a slow but consistent poverty reduction rate of .02 percent, and some progress in the areas of women empowerment, mortality rate, literacy rate, girls' education etc the economy seems to be on a strong foothold. But Abul Barakat, well-known economist and professor of economics, has little respect for those statistics: "Statistic economy always makes a good reading but these are mostly cooked up. The real economy is different," says Abul Barakat grimly. The first thing he identifies is

the inequality between the rich and poor, which, he believes, has worsened under the present government. According to government provided statistics, income of the rich has increased by 14 percent while that of the poor decreased by four percent on an average in the last few years, Barakat says. It's natural that the number of poor people would rise along with the rise of population, but what has been happening in our country is, many who belonged to lower-middle class group are becoming poor, while many who used to be bracketed with middle class are being relegated into the lower middle-class fold, he elaborates. "The government has taken no conscious efforts to arrest this trend of ever-soaring inequality," he says.

The country's economic activities, especially in the industrial sector, which Barakat terms as the "lifeline of economy", has suffered a major setback under the present government's four years' rule. As many as 3,000 big, medium and small-sized industrial units have been closed down. A good many heavy industrial units like Chittagong Steel Mill and the largest jute mill of the world, Adamjee Jute Mills, (which is not exactly a heavy industry, but can be grouped with them because of its size), sugar mills as well as small and medium sized enterprises like

**The government has also done precious little in the agriculture sector. "Our economy is still agro-based, but if anyone deserves credit for anything good that happened to the agriculture, it is the peasant and Allah; the government did nothing," Barakat emphasises.**

Rise in the price of daily essentials is often the result of non-economic factors rather than the dynamics of supply and demand.

