

# NEELUM-JHELUM HYDROPOWER PROJECT MAY BE PRIVITIZED

By

**Khawar Ghumman**

Islamabad : in order to ensure its early completion, the PML-N government may either involve the private sector in construction of 969 MW Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower Project or completely privatize it.

Mr. Nawaz Sharif visited the project site soon after assuming the charge as Prime Minister in June 2013 and issued directives for its completion within the 2013-2014 fiscal years.

But later he was told that because of changes in the design, the project required more time for completion. The deadline was subsequently revised and extended to the end of 2016.

However, at a meeting of the cabinet committee on energy here on Thursday, the Prime Minister got annoyed when he learnt that the project would not be ready by its new deadline.

As a result, the meeting decided “to form a committee to look into the possibility of privatizing the project of entering into partnership with investors to ensure its timely completion”.

According to an official statement, the committee has been asked to present a report on the matter within three months.

Mr. Nawaz Sharif asked the departments concerned to complete the project by the first quarter of 2017.

A change made in the project’s original design after the October 2005 earthquake and delays in the release of funds for its implementation are the main reasons for failure to complete the project on time.

Thursday’s meeting lasted for four hours and was the 15th one to be held by the cabinet committee on energy. Water and Power Secretary Younas Dagha updated the meeting on the progress made on ongoing power projects which were not part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

The meeting expressed satisfaction that as per plans electricity was being out for around six hours in urban areas and about eight hours in rural areas.

The Prime Minister said that in Ramazan there should be no load shedding from 6:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Similarly there should be no load shedding one hour before and one hour after Sehr. The total duration of load shedding should not exceed the approved limits.

The meeting was attended, among others, by Water and Power Minister Khawaja Asif, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Petroleum Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, Railways Minister Saad Rafiq, Minister of State for Water and Power Abid Sher Ali, Minister of State for Petroleum Jam Kamal Khan, Adviser to the PM on National Security Sartaj Aziz, Special Assistant to the PM on Foreign Affairs Tariq Fatemi, Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, Petroleum Secretary Srshad Mirza, WAPDA Chairman Zafar Mahmood and Cabinet Secretary Raja Hasan Abbas.

*(Courtesy of Dawn 19-06-2015)*