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Zakhilwal is a Liar: Sherzai

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JALALABAD - Nangarhar governor on Saturday strongly criticized Finance Minister Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal for not honoring his repeated promises to start construction works on two key highway projects in the eastern province.

Addressing participants at a workshop on economic development in Jalalabad, the provincial capital, Gul Agha Sherzai said Zakhilwal was a liar, who had promised him twice to launch works on the Kabul-Jalalabad and Jalalabad-Torkham highways, but was yet to keep his words.

Sherzai further said Zakhilwal had also promised him to release \$15 million to the provincial government for a sub-power station at the Hisar Shahi Industrial Park.

"We don't want the finance minister. He is a liar," Sherzai said.

The governor said he had information that India was willing to fund the extension of electricity to the industrial park. He would send the provincial power department head to Kabul to meet the Indian embassy officials to discuss the matter.

Sherzai said reconstruction projects, initiated by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), in Nangarhar had been put on hold.

He claimed the ministry was unable to provide funds to the provincial departments despite a quarter of the current fiscal year had passed.

The governor warned he would terminate departmental heads who failed to obtain funds from the ministry at the earliest.

He said 52 heads of departments were invited to attend the workshop, but 30 of them did not turn up, threatening to punish the absentees.

Head researcher at the provincial revenue department, Mohammad Alam Ishaqzai, told workshop participants that industries could not flourish in the province until there was electricity supply.

He claimed customs offices' revenues had declined due to interference from powerful individuals, but did not name anyone.

He said most appointments to the customs offices were carried out under pressure from politicians and mafia groups.

Ishaqzai urged the governor to remove corrupt officials from provincial departments.

He also criticized the municipality department for not submitting its monthly reports on taxes and revenue.