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Striking teachers

It seems that the government has now decided to go for rigid measures against the striking non-government secondary school teachers, who have refused to abandon the industrial action despite assurances from the highest authorities that their demands would be sympathetically considered. The Education Ministry on Monday issued an ultimatum to the teachers to report for duty at their respective schools by April 5 failing which disciplinary action would be taken against them. These may include the loss of jobs. Other steps that are being planned are the cancellation of government grants for the schools where teachers refuse to join their work and in some cases the derecognition of the schools by the secondary education boards.

It is more than five weeks that the private school teachers have gone on strike demanding the outright nationalisation of about 15000 privately-run secondary schools in the country. A state takeover of such a huge number of schools at a time would have thrown the country's education budget into disarray, whereas an outright nationalisation would not have improved the standards of education. As a matter of fact, it would have brought down the standards in the better schools that are now being run by the state.

The private schools nevertheless are enjoying government grants and recent pay increases of the non-government school teachers had actually raised the quantum of government aid to these schools to a substantial level. The Government promised that it would look into the cases of individual schools and would nationalise them in phases on their individual merit.

The striking teachers have shown the highest degree of irresponsibility by trying to force a government decision through threats of boycotting the crucial SSC examinations. They had actually taken all steps to see that the examinations were abandoned, and there are evidences that in some places, they had physically tried to obstruct the holding of the examinations. But because of the support from the large majority of parents and guardians, the government was able to go ahead with the school final examinations on schedule.

There is no doubt that the striking teachers had received no support from the masses and if they continue with their industrial action any longer, they will find themselves further isolated. Already the government is in a better position to deal with the strike now that the SSC examinations are practically over.