

Peru teachers agree to end 15-day strike

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LIMA, Peru --

Peru's public school teachers on Thursday ended a 15-day strike against a new law requiring them to take competency tests after government officials agreed to talks on their demand for better training.

Cabinet chief Jorge del Castillo said the teachers will return to work Friday.

About 15 percent of Peru's 350,000 teachers walked off the job July 5 to protest the reform under which they will be fired if they fail a competency test three times, the Education Ministry said. The teachers' union had said the law will lead to "arbitrary" firings.

February tests showed almost half of the teachers cannot solve basic math problems and one-third are deficient in reading comprehension.

Earlier Thursday, officials closed the Cuzco airport after 200 teachers set fire to the facility's grassy border, forcing the cancellation of 13 flights and stranding thousands of travelers at the height of the tourist season, Katty Mora, an airport security department employee, told The Associated Press.

The teachers' strike coincided with a nine-day protest by farmers demanding lower seed prices, which also ended Thursday.

During the protests, major roads were blockaded in interior provinces, and in Cuzco, rail travel to Machu Picchu - the country's top tourist destination - was temporarily suspended after protesters threw rocks at the cars, damaging the tracks.