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Railroads, unions expect strike soon

WASHINGTON - Freight railroads and their unions bargained against a midnight deadline Tuesday, with little hope of averting a coast-to-coast strike that could strand rail passengers and stop the flow of one-third of the nation's goods.

The strike, the first nationwide walkout since 1982, could idle 235,000 freight workers and perhaps a half-million other Americans with non-rail jobs.

"Nothing has changed. We're still meeting, negotiating, and I suppose growing a bit more pessimistic that this is not going to be averted," said Dan Lang, a spokesman for the Association of American Railroads.

As the hours wound toward the deadline, Larry McFather, president of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, said "we feel we have no choice" but to strike. "Our people have been cut to the bone."

Presidential spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said the Bush administration was prepared to work with Congress on speedy legislation "to impose a settlement and end the strike."

House Speaker Thomas Foley said there would be no action before a strike began. But congressional leaders, meeting behind closed doors, said that if a walkout occurred, they would hurry legislation to resolve the dispute.

State railroaders prepare

OMAHA - About 10,000 railway union workers in Nebraska prepared to picket over wages and benefits as a national railway strike appeared imminent Tuesday.

"I anticipate the (picket) signs in storage for a number of years will be taken out," said Ray Lineweber, Nebraska state legislative director for the United Transportation Union.

Freight railroads and their unions said Tuesday they were dead-

locked after an all-night bargaining session.

Omaha-based Union Pacific Railroad will be completely shut down in the event of a strike and will lose \$4 million in the first day, railroad spokesman John Bromley said.

Lost revenue, overtime for non-striking workers and other costs would make it too difficult to estimate the losses beyond the first day, he said.

Gorbachev woos Japanese officials

TOKYO - Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev devoted his first day in Japan Tuesday to chipping away at the mutual animosity that has kept Tokyo from sharing its immense wealth with its impoverished neighbor.

Briefly leaving behind economic and political woes to become the first Soviet leader to travel to Japan, Gorbachev set out to woo the Japanese as he has done with Americans and Europeans.

He spent the day meeting with Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu, cheerfully chatting with Emperor Akihito and shaking hands with Tokyo residents.

"It is time to do everything so that our peoples... will never again drift into the disaster of enmity," Gorbachev said at a nationally televised court banquet Tuesday night. "On the threshold of a new century and millennium, we must take from the past

only that which brings us together and enriches both sides."

He was referring to the huge task of healing the wounds left from World War II, when the Soviets seized four islands off Japan's northern coast and tens of thousands of Japanese prisoners of war died in Siberian camps.

In his banquet toast, Gorbachev offered condolences to the families of the Japanese prisoners who perished, but stopped short of a formal apology. He is expected to give the Japanese a list of the dead before he leaves Friday.

That follows the tone of reconciliation he set Monday in the Siberian city of Khabarovsk, where he visited the graves of Japanese who died while being held prisoner.

The territorial dispute remains a formidable obstacle. Japan demands return of all four islands — known to

Soviets as the Kuril Islands and to Japanese as the Northern Territories — before it will sign a treaty formally ending World War II hostilities with the Soviets, thereby clearing the way for aid.

Gorbachev faces strong opposition at home to any territorial concessions.

Half of his three-hour summit meeting with Kaifu, which was described by a Japanese official as a "frank exchange of views," was devoted to the dispute, and the leaders agreed not to divulge any details until after further talks.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Japanese economic aid was not discussed.

In the meeting, Gorbachev said Soviet relations were advancing with nations throughout the West and that bilateral ties with Tokyo "must be

improved substantially," another Japanese official said. The official also spoke on condition of anonymity.

In some areas, Soviet-Japanese relations are frozen and in other areas "life can hardly be seen," Gorbachev spokesman Vilyaly Ignatenko quoted the Soviet leader as saying.

The Soviet president and his wife, Raisa, did their best Tuesday to warm up relations.

An invitation from Gorbachev for Kaifu to visit Moscow was immediately accepted, and the two leaders were shown frequently on television smiling, shaking hands and sharing laughs.

In what has become a signature gesture, Gorbachev stopped his motorcade and shook hands with some of the 200 bystanders who crowded near his bullet-proof Zil limousine.

High court limits appeals for inmates on death row

WASHINGTON - The Supreme Court on Tuesday narrowed the right of death row inmates to make repeated appeals in federal court, a ruling that could hasten many executions.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the court, said the 6-3 decision in a Georgia case should curtail abuses that contribute to an average gap of nearly nine years between convictions and executions in capital punishment cases.

"Perpetual disrespect for the finality of convictions disparages the entire criminal justice system," Kennedy said.

The three dissenters accused the court of substituting its own rules for those of Congress to cut back drastically on the rights of criminal

defendants without even acknowledging the change.

In the case, the court dismissed arguments by Warren McCleskey that Georgia officials violated his rights by using a fellow inmate to elicit McCleskey's confession to the 1978 slaying of an Atlanta police officer.

Kennedy said McCleskey's failure to raise the issue during an initial federal court appeal in 1981 disqualified him from raising it in subsequent appeals.

McCleskey's murder conviction was overturned in 1989 by a federal judge who said Georgia officials had violated his rights by making a deal with another inmate, Offie Evans, to obtain a confession from McCleskey.

McDonald's plans to cut its garbage

WASHINGTON - McDonald's Corp. announced on Tuesday a plan aimed at eliminating 80 percent or more of the garbage created by its 8,500 fast-food restaurants across the nation.

The initiatives include the use of brown bags made of recycled paper, smaller paper napkins, recycling of behind-the-counter cardboard boxes, and the elimination of plastic cutlery wrappers where allowed by local health codes. And the company is trying out reusable coffee mugs, reusable coffee filters, and pump-style bulk condiment dispensers.

McDonald's, the world's largest food service organization, said also it is looking into replacing the plastic forks, spoons and knives with starch-based cutlery that could be composted. It also plans large-scale, soil-enriching composting of food and paper wastes on an experimental basis.

Parts of the plan already have been put implemented, such as the switch last fall from polystyrene sandwich boxes to a thin-layered wrap. Before the changes were begun, McDonald's outlets sent 2 million pounds of garbage per day to incinerators and landfills in the United States.

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