

Gorbachev's plea gets cold shoulder

TOKYO - Japan's elite toasted and cheered Mikhail Gorbachev Wednesday, but turned a cold shoulder to the Soviet leader's frank plea for aid and investment.

Gorbachev, in a speech to parliament, urged Japan to join the "new spirit in Soviet-U.S. relations" that began with the end of the Cold War and promised that the Soviet Union would never attack Japan.

He also claimed broad Soviet military reductions in Asia and said he did not intend to interfere with Japan's most important relationship, its security treaty with America.

Yet midway through Gorbachev's historic four-day visit, deep-seated Japanese doubts about their giant Soviet neighbor and its economic stability were proving more difficult to overcome than Cold War hostility.

Accompanied by his wife, Raisa, the 60-year-old Soviet president entered the wood-paneled main chamber of the Diet, or parliament, to a standing ovation. He received another when he finished speaking 45 minutes later.

In his most plain-spoken request to date for foreign aid, Gorbachev warned that "the development of a new peaceful world order will largely depend on the outcome of perestroika. . . . We are counting on support for our efforts, particularly now as we go through this critical stage."

"If we let the new social processes get out of hand, the country may really be thrown into the chaos that gives birth to dictatorship," he said in a speech interrupted seven times by applause.

At a luncheon meeting earlier, Gorbachev was blunter about asking for aid. He threw out most of a prepared text in trying to persuade 600

business leaders he was serious about reforming the crumbling Soviet economy.

"Our Far East and Siberia have resources, but they lack the infrastructure to develop them," Gorbachev said, adding that the Soviet Union has much to learn from Japan's experience of converting military industries to commercial use.

Gorbachev stressed he was aware of the need for the Soviet Union to deal with its outstanding debts.

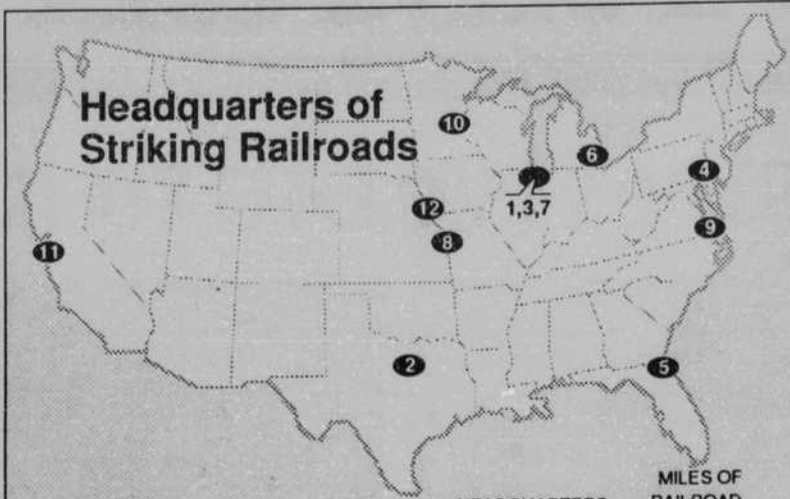
"This year has been especially difficult because our oil exports have declined due to the gulf war. But we have the resources to resolve the problem. Your understanding would be appreciated," he said.

But Japan's hard-nosed business elders, whose savvy built this country into the world's No. 2 economic power, said political and economic problems must be resolved before they can invest.

"It was all requests. (Gorbachev) didn't have any gifts to offer us. That's a pity," said one executive who refused to give his name. Indeed, the Soviets are asking Japan for a loan to pay off hundreds of millions of dollars of debt for Japanese exports.

As expected, there was no progress reported on Japan's main condition for freeing up Japanese capital: that the Soviets return four islands off northern Japan seized in the closing days of World War II.

Territorial concessions of any kind are risky in a nation beset by separatist movements, and Gorbachev seems to be under the sway of hard-liners who oppose such a move. His political rival, Russian President Boris Yeltsin, also has warned that no deal can be made on the islands without his republic's approval.



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1 Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe	Chicago	12,226
2 Burlington Northern	Fort Worth, Texas	27,207
3 Chicago & North Western	Chicago	5,763
4 Conrail	Philadelphia	14,395
5 CSX	Jacksonville, Fla.	26,220
6 Grand Trunk	Detroit	221
7 Illinois Central	Chicago	2,947
8 Kansas City Southern	Kansas City, Mo.	863
9 Norfolk Southern	Norfolk, Va.	26,335
10 SOO Line	Minneapolis	6,987
11 Southern Pacific	San Francisco	11,844
12 Union Pacific	Omaha	10,845

Nationwide strike: Freight carriers ground to a halt

Freight trains ground to a halt Wednesday in the first nationwide railroad strike in nearly a decade, halting rail shipping of everything from coal to car parts and interfering with most Amtrak trains and some commuter services.

"Anyone out there want to give me a lift to New York? I'm at the railway station," said Australian tourist James Veel, who was stranded at Raleigh, N.C.

Congress and the Bush administration sought a quick end to the strike, with talks focusing on a cooling-off period that would allow a new emergency board to make recommendations for settlement on a contract to replace one that expired in 1988.

Freight carriers and unions scheduled no new talks after last-ditch bargaining failed to produce a settlement before the midnight Tuesday expiration of an initial cooling-off period. The strike waged by eight unions and honored by three others against 10 companies, started at 7 a.m.

The strike by 235,000 rail workers over wages, work rules and health care costs could also idle as many as a half-million non-railroad workers.

Troops back to buffer zone

SAFWAN, Iraq - The U.S. military presence in southern Iraq shrank to a narrow buffer zone along the Kuwait border Wednesday.

For the first time, meanwhile, U.S. soldiers entered northern Iraq to look for sites that will serve as camps for Kurdish refugees. The Pentagon said U.S., French and British troops would build tent cities and provide food and medical care for the Kurds.

At the southern buffer zone, the field commander in charge of the 18,000 soldiers of the 3rd Armored Division said they would feed and protect refugees in the area until relief agencies can take over the plug. "We're not going to pull the plug until people can take care of themselves or until there's somebody else here to take care of them," said Lt. Col. John Kalb, who runs a sector of the Kuwait border zone that includes the U.S. Army-run refugee camp in Safwan.

An estimated 40,000 Iraqis are in the zone, seeking refuge from civil unrest in southern Iraq, where Shiite Muslims rebelled against Saddam Hussein.

The zone, which was created under the cease-fire implemented by the U.N. Security Council, stretches six miles into Iraq and three miles into Kuwait.

Iraqi and Kuwaiti military units are barred from the zone, but the Iraqi part of the zone is to return to the civil control of Saddam's government once U.N. peacekeeping troops are deployed. Many refugees who deserted from the Iraqi army or supported anti-government uprisings fear that change-over will give free reign to Iraqi police to exact revenge.

Kalb said the refugees would be safe as long as U.S. troops were around. He said that no regular Iraqi police had returned to Safwan, but that sev-

eral secret police agents had been arrested by the Americans. They were seeking information on the U.S. military and the names of Iraqis working with the Americans, he said.

Kalb said American soldiers might stay on to run humanitarian programs even after the 1,440-member U.N. peacekeeping force begins patrolling the buffer zone. No deployment timetable has been set.

Kalb's staff said the other major U.S. contingent in Iraq, the 1st Infantry Division, finished moving out early Wednesday, leaving only the 3rd Armored from the 200,000 American soldiers who occupied the area after the allied victory in late February.

U.S. military strength in the Persian Gulf theater dropped under 270,000 men and women Wednesday, just under half the peak at the war's end, the U.S. Central Command in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, said.

Small victory Soviet mine goes back to work

MOSCOW - The nation's largest coal mine resumed operations Wednesday free from Kremlin control — a small crack in a crippling strike but a victory in the fight by republics to gain control over Soviet industry and natural wealth.

Meanwhile, workers in other industries threatened to join miners who continued the 7-week-old strike.

The strike was backed by a veteran dissident who returned to Moscow this week after more than 15 years in exile.

Vladimir Bukovsky urged protests and said a general walkout "is the only solution" to force Kremlin re-

forms and to oust President Mikhail Gorbachev. He was in Tokyo seeking Japanese investment for the crumbling Soviet economy.

Some hard-liners also have demanded Gorbachev's resignation, saying he has not acted firmly enough to end ethnic and labor strife.

The mine strikes have battered the Soviet economy and posed a strong challenge to Gorbachev's authority as party chief and government president. The miners started the strike on March 1 demanding pay raises, but Gorbachev's resignation has become their main goal.

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