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NEWS DIGEST

your quick guide to news from around the world

Boutros-Ghali passes on second UN term

1 UNITED NATIONS — Beaten down by unrelenting U.S. opposition, U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali suspended his candidacy for a second term Wednesday, opening the way for new nominees for the top U.N. post.

U.N. spokesman Sylvana Foa said the 74-year-old Egyptian diplomat remains a candidate.

"What he has simply done is to ask that his name not be put on the table for a second vote for the time being," Foa said.

The United States cast the lone vote against him in the 15-member Security Council on Nov. 19.

Western diplomats said they expected African countries to submit names of alternative African candidates to the Security Council, possibly as early as Friday.

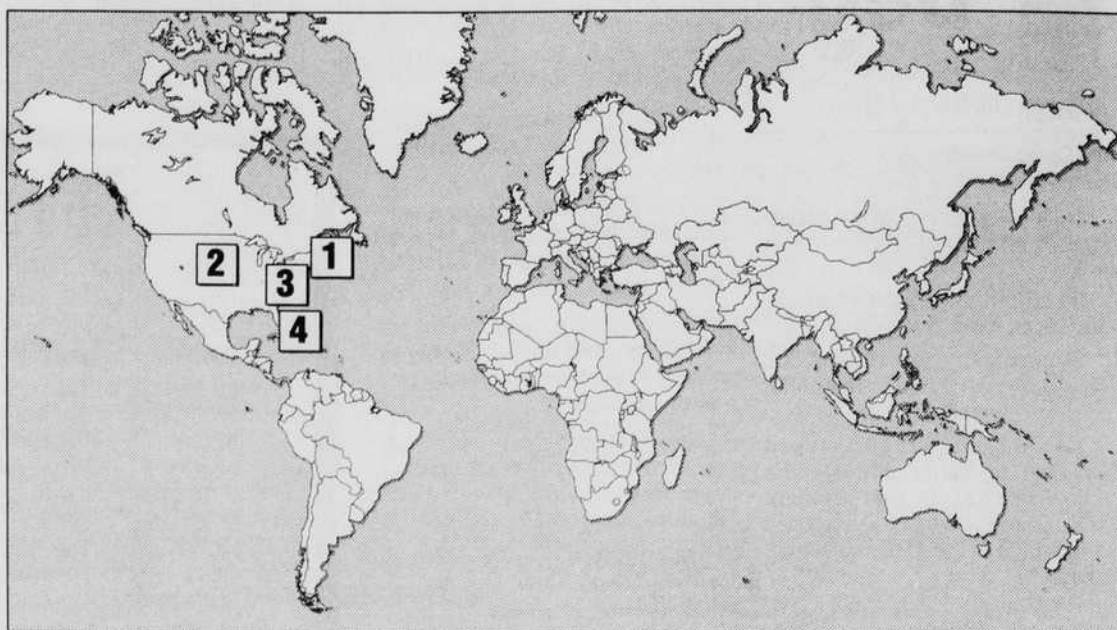
This would be followed by a series of straw polls next week to weed out weaker candidates.

The United States announced last July that it would veto Boutros-Ghali, claiming he had not been vigorous in pursuing reform.

His supporters say the Clinton administration was bowing to pressure from conservative Republicans in Congress who see the United Nations in general as a challenge to U.S. sovereignty.

Despite the U.S. veto, the Africans had been standing behind Boutros-Ghali — in part because they would not agree on a new candidate.

The council must choose a secretary-general and forward the name to the 185-member General Assembly for ratification before Boutros-Ghali's term expires Dec. 31.



Man may get 50 years for killing admirer

2 PONTIAC, Mich. — A man who killed a gay admirer who had revealed his crush and hugged him on the "Jenny Jones Show" was sentenced Wednesday to 25 to 50 years in prison.

Jonathan Schmitz, 26, faced a life sentence for the murder of Scott Amedure in a case that focused attention on "ambush television" and the tactics TV producers use to bring guests onto daytime talk shows.

"I'd like to say the word sorry," Schmitz told Judge Francis O'Brien before his sentence was delivered. "The word 'sorry' is a very powerful word. It has a lot of meaning, and it is meant."

The judge said he took Schmitz's illnesses into account — his defense lawyers said he had been fighting alcoholism, depression and a thyroid condition.

However, "you still have to be accountable to society," said O'Brien, who added two more years on a weapons charge. Schmitz will likely remain behind bars for at least 20 years.

Panel claims inflation overestimated by CPI

3 WASHINGTON — The government overstates inflation, an advisory panel concluded Wednesday, proposing changes that could shave billions from the deficit but raise taxes for millions of Americans and cost Social Security recipients a chunk of their annual increase.

The panel said the Consumer Price Index exaggerates inflation by 1.1 percentage points annually and should be scrapped in favor of a true cost-of-living index, producing \$691 billion in deficit savings over a decade.

The savings would come from trimming the cost-of-living adjustments made to Social Security and other government pensions received by 60 million Americans. Savings would also come from raising tax payments by making smaller inflation adjustments each year to tax brackets.

The proposal would lower the annual adjustment for Social Security by \$8 a month in the first year it went into effect, according to projections.

Space rover races to rendezvous with Mars

4 CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A six-wheeled rover no bigger than a child's wagon sped toward Mars on Wednesday on a 310-million-mile odyssey to explore the planet's rocky, red surface.

The Mars Pathfinder, the spacecraft carrying the rover, is scheduled to drop down onto the planet's surface on July 4. Its 30 mph landing will be cushioned by large air bags that will inflate at the last moment.

Then the unmanned rover, named Sojourner, will amble out in search of rocks.

It is the first time a mobile craft has been sent to explore the surface of another planet.

NASA hopes that Pathfinder, the second of 10 spacecraft to be launched to Mars over the next decade, will live up to its name by paving the way for future robotic explorers. NASA also hopes Pathfinder will prove that cheap little spacecraft can work.

—The Associated Press

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