

NEWS DIGEST

your quick guide to news from around the world

Texaco takes action on controversial tapes

1 WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. — Texaco fired one executive, kept another on suspension and dropped benefits for two retirees Wednesday for their secretly recorded comments degrading minorities and suggesting lawsuit documents be destroyed.

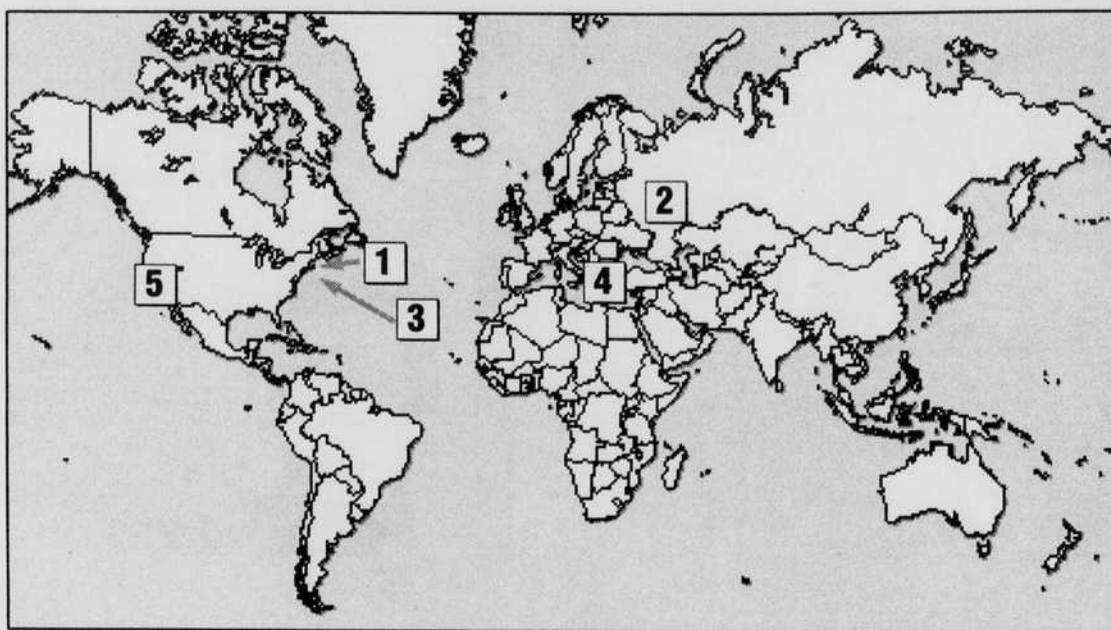
The retirees include Richard Lundwall, the executive who made the tapes and released them to plaintiffs in a race-discrimination lawsuit. Texaco, facing the threat of a boycott after the tapes were made public, quickly settled the case for \$176 million.

Lundwall is the only Texaco executive charged so far in a federal investigation into whether documents sought by the plaintiffs were destroyed by company executives.

In 1994, the company's 1,400 minority workers filed a racial discrimination suit.

The tapes of Finance Department meetings about the race lawsuit record Lundwall and Ulrich talking about throwing away or shredding documents the plaintiffs had requested in court. Ulrich said, "We're going to purge the (expletive) out of these books" and Lundwall said, "Let me shred this thing."

They also made comments critical of black employees. According to the company's "enhanced" version of the tapes, Lundwall and Ulrich mocked the black cultural celebration Kwanzaa, with Ulrich saying, "I'm still struggling with Hanukkah, and now we have Kwanzaa. I mean I lost Christmas, poor St. Nicholas, they (expletive) all over his beard."



Yeltsin battles with flu, enters hospital

2 MOSCOW — A flu-stricken Boris Yeltsin was taken back to the hospital Wednesday with what the Kremlin called signs of pneumonia.

The president will remain at the Kremlin hospital several days, his press service said in a terse statement that gave little insight into the 65-year-old's condition.

The late-night return to the Central Clinical Hospital is sure to prompt new questions about whether Yeltsin is healthy enough to actively rule Russia. It also will likely renew cries from his opponents that he is unfit and should step down.

By all accounts and appearances, Yeltsin has been recovering well from his Nov. 5 quintuple bypass operation.

Congress interviews Albright in hearing

3 WASHINGTON — First up in the Senate review of President Clinton's second-term Cabinet, Madeleine Albright pointedly told Congress the State Department can't achieve foreign policy goals "on the cheap."

Presaging coming battles over foreign policy, Secretary of State nominee Albright challenged Republican lawmakers to provide the money necessary for continued U.S. leadership abroad.

Talk at Albright's confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday was of cooperation and bipartisanship.

Albright seemed assured of easy confirmation. As the first female secretary of state, Albright would be the highest-ranking woman in any U.S. administration.

Milosevic concedes loss in Nis elections

4 NIS, Yugoslavia — Weeks of street protests and international arm-twisting wrung a key concession Wednesday from Serbia's ruling party: It acknowledged that opposition candidates won elections in Nis, the republic's second-largest city.

President Slobodan Milosevic's courts had annulled Nov. 17 opposition victories in Belgrade, Nis and 12 other municipalities, sparking the massive daily protests that have been the biggest challenge ever to his authoritarian rule.

In a statement, his Socialist government conceded Nis (pronounced Neesh), and said that those who blocked the rightful winners should be punished.

The statement represented a painful concession for Milosevic.

New Intel MMX chip speeds up computers

5 SAN FRANCISCO — Intel Corp. displayed personal computers equipped with a new chip Wednesday that show more detailed graphics, richer sound, faster animation and 3-D effects.

The hope is that PCs equipped with the Intel Pentium MMX chips will put consumers back in the buying mood.

The Intel microprocessors with the new technology will run existing programs up to 20 percent faster than previous same-speed processors, the company said.

This means improvements in a wide variety of programs, including photo and video editing, 3-D graphics, animation and games, Intel said.

"Our whole goal here is to deliver a new level of performance, a new level of capability to the consumer," said Mike Aymar, vice president of Intel's desktop products group.

The PC industry hopes to get a boost from the new chip and snazzy new software written for it. Personal computers did not sell as well over the holiday season as manufacturers and retailers hoped.

Industry observers think some consumers interested in buying PCs held off purchases knowing that computers with the MMX chip would be available this month. Some believe the new processor could encourage more people to buy PCs.

Nathan Brookwood, an analyst with Dataquest Inc. of San Jose, Calif., said the new processor also demonstrates what Intel and the rest of the PC industry must do: make computers more relevant to the average person.

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