

Doctors: Pinochet not fit for trial

LONDON (AP) — Doctors ruled that Gen. Augusto Pinochet was unfit to stand trial on human rights abuse charges, the government announced Tuesday, opening the possibility that the former Chilean dictator could win his battle against extradition.

The Home Office said the four-member medical team who examined Pinochet on Jan. 5 unanimously agreed that he was too ill to face trial, "and that no change to that position can be expected."

They did not immediately make details available on why he was considered unfit. But The Sunday Times reported in London last weekend that the doctors had found Pinochet was suffering from a viral infection, diabetes, heart disease and the effects of two mild strokes. His diabetes reportedly has caused a loss of sensation in his hands and feet.

The decision could halt efforts to try Pinochet in connection with the disappearances and killings of thousands of Chileans during his 17-year rule there. He could be released on humanitarian grounds.

The statement also said Home Secretary Jack Straw felt that he should not extradite Pinochet to Spain until hearing arguments from parties to the case.

The news was greeted with protest and support in Chile.

Officials with the Organization of Relatives of Missing Detainees, a group dedicated to dissidents who disappeared after being arrested under the Pinochet dictatorship, said they were disappointed.



DEMONSTRATORS SEND a message to Shepherdstown, W. Va., negotiators during a protest in Tel Aviv, Israel, Monday. The largest rally in Israel's recent history took place to protest returning the Golan Heights to Syria in exchange for peace.

David Blumenfeld/NewsMakers

Barak keeps peace aims

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — A confident Prime Minister Ehud Barak said Tuesday he could sell a land-for-peace deal with Syria to the Israeli public, despite growing opposition at home to a likely pullout from the Golan Heights.

As Barak returned home after eight days of talks with the Syrians, two ministers in his government were threatening to bolt rather than accept a withdrawal from the strategic plateau, and polls indicated public opinion was hardening on the issue.

On Monday night, more than 100,000 people demonstrated in a Tel Aviv square against a withdrawal.

Barak remained unruffled. "When we bring an agreement that will secure Israel's defense, its future and that of its children, most of the people in the square yesterday will be with us on the agreement," he told Channel Two television.

"We are reaching the decisive stage," he said, rejecting suggestions by opponents that he slow down the talks. He agreed with the assessment by

President Clinton, who sponsored the talks in West Virginia, that a core agreement could be in place in two months. The talks are set to resume next Wednesday.

Barak acknowledged he could not offer anything concrete from his journey — but he said that was not the point of this round of talks.

Asked if Israelis could expect any confidence-building measures from Syria, he responded: "At this stage, no."

The benefit of this round, he said, was simply that "for the first time, professional Israeli and Syrian teams met on security, water, normalization and ... borders."

But the vigor of the opposition clearly spelled impending trouble for Barak, who campaigned for office on a peacemaking platform, then put together a broad-based government of dovish secularists, hawkish Orthodox Jews and immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

A poll published Friday by the Yediot Ahronot daily indicated that in

the referendum Barak has pledged to call on a deal with Syria, 49 percent of Israelis would favor exchanging almost all of the Golan for peace, with 44 percent opposed. A similar poll last month indicated 59 percent would favor giving up almost all of the heights, while only 35 percent were opposed.

Friday's poll, conducted after the launch of the talks in Shepherdstown, W.Va., had a margin of error of 4.5 percentage points.

The shift in opinion has been seen partly as a result of the icy atmosphere at the talks. Israeli columnists have repeatedly noted Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa's refusal to even shake Barak's hand.

Opponents of the emerging deal say the Golan is too important strategically to risk, especially in a peace accord they say Syria might not keep.

Housing Minister Yitzhak Levy, head of the settler-oriented National Religious Party, said he would leave the coalition and work to defeat the peace deal if Barak agreed to a withdrawal.

—WORLD/NATION—

■ Netherlands

Bosnian Serbs charged with genocide plead innocent

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Two Bosnian Serbs who allegedly led an onslaught that killed hundreds of Muslims and Croats and sent tens of thousands fleeing for their lives, pleaded innocent Tuesday to 12 counts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The case of Gen. Momir Talic and Radoslav Brdjanin comes as the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal reaps a harvest of increasingly senior Serb military commanders detained for trial.

Prosecutors are aiming high for the first genocide conviction in the seven years since the international court was established.

Talic, the current Bosnian Serb military chief, and Brdjanin, a former deputy prime minister, appeared at a pretrial hearing on their joint indictment.

■ Florida

Miami judge's affiliations questioned

MIAMI (AP) — A spokesman for Elian Gonzalez's Miami relatives earned \$10,000 as a political consultant for the judge who defied a federal order and awarded temporary custody of the Cuban boy to a relative in the United States.

Miami-Dade County Circuit Judge Rosa Rodriguez said Tuesday she was not required to remove herself from the case because of the affiliation, a suggestion made by a legal expert.

Armando Gutierrez, who has spoken on behalf of the 6-year-old boy's relatives, said he worked for Rodriguez during her 1998 election campaign.

Gutierrez, who runs a public relations firm, said he hasn't spoken with the judge in 18 months and that his work for her did not influence her ruling.

■ Texas

A&M bonfire's log ropes cut before collapse

COLLEGE STATION, Texas (AP) — Four stabilizing ropes were cut on the stack of Texas A&M bonfire logs just hours before they collapsed and killed 12, a report said.

But a senior who helped build the bonfire last year said Tuesday that the cutting of the lines was a standard procedure and probably did not cause the collapse.

Douglas Keegan visited the site of the 7,000-log stack about an hour before the disaster, which killed a dozen of his fellow Aggies and injured 27 on Nov. 18.

The lower four of eight guy lines stretching from perimeter poles to the center pole — the spine of the stack — had been cut a few hours earlier, according to an engineering firm's report released by the school Monday.

■ Washington, D.C.

Stamp prices may increase in the next year

WASHINGTON (AP) — Expect to pay a penny more to send cards and letters starting early next year.

The cost of mailing magazines and catalogs is expected to go up significantly — proposals that are stirring up a hornet's nest in the business community.

Letters would cost 34 cents under rates proposed Tuesday.

WEATHER

TODAY

Partly sunny,
high 54, low 19

TOMORROW

Fair,
high 48, low 26

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Virginia rape case argued

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court justices appeared to doubt whether Congress could try to protect women against violence by letting rape victims sue their attackers in federal court.

Hearing arguments Tuesday in the case of a former Virginia Tech student who wants to sue two football players she says raped her, the justices noted such issues are traditionally left to state courts.

"Your approach ... would justify a federal remedy for alimony or child support," Justice Sandra Day O'Connor told Solicitor General Seth Waxman as he asked the justices to reinstate a key portion of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act.

Julie Goldscheid, the former student's lawyer, argued along with Waxman that the federal law, thrown out by an appeals court, was needed because gender-based violence restricts women's choices in jobs and travel.

Justice Antonin Scalia said all types of crime could have similar effects. Such logic "would allow general federal criminal laws on all subjects because all crime affects interstate commerce," he said.

Michael E. Rosman, representing the two former football players, said the law encroaches on traditional state powers and does not come under Congress'

power to regulate interstate commerce.

Allowing Congress to enact such laws could "relegate the states to a trivial and unimportant role," Rosman said.

The nation's highest court has increasingly tipped the balance of power away from the federal government and toward the states in a series of 5-4 decisions, including a ruling Tuesday that shielded state governments against federal age-bias claims by their employees.

It seemed likely that the Violence Against Women Act case could follow the same pattern when it is decided by this summer.

Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., the law's author, said after the argument session that the court should show deference to Congress' conclusion that states were not doing enough to protect rape victims.

Waxman told the justices Congress found that "archaic prejudices and improper stereotypes" about women were affecting the outcome of cases in state courts. The government's court brief contended violent crime against women costs the nation at least \$3 billion a year.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, formerly a pioneering women's rights advocate, suggested that the Violence Against Women Act could be seen as an "alternative remedy."