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TK 3CR EXTORTION ALLEGATION

Azam Chy now says he did not file case against Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Industrialist Azam J Chowdhury yesterday told the press that he did not file any case "directly" against former prime minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina.
"What I did [say in the case] has been distorted and has not come to the public properly," Azam told newsmen at a local hotel following the Annual Business Conference of Prime Bank of which he is the chairman.
Azam said he filed the case against Sheikh Selim. Referring to the Tk 2.99 crore extortion, he said Selim had taken the money saying he was taking the money for the prime minister who had asked him to do so.
"Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the father of the nation

and his daughter Sheikh Hasina is a former prime minister. A prime minister is a respected person. Why should I file a case against her directly?" Azam said.
"There has been a wrong perception about this case," he added.
Azam J Chowdhury filed the case on June 13 last year, accusing Hasina and her cousin Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim of taking Tk 2.99 crore as extortion from him for awarding a 210MW power project contract. Azam is the local agent of a Russian company that won the contract.
Police later included the name of Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana in the charge sheet as another accused.
This was the first case against a former prime minister under the present caretaker government and

it stirred the public in general as Azam is known for having good terms with the previous governments. He has been involved in the power, petroleum and banking sectors for 30 years.
Before filing the case, there had been no trace of Azam for three days. On June 13, he was seen at the Gulshan Police Station filing the case.
Azam has never talked about the case in public since then until yesterday.
"It can be said that the case against Hasina was filed by Sheikh Selim," he said, contradicting the fact that he had accused both Hasina and Selim in the first information report (FIR).
He, however, said, "When a case is filed, an investigation officer probes the matter and drops or

adds names of people as accused. It has also happened in this case. The final decision rests upon the court."
When journalists told him that in the court Selim denied taking any money from him, Azam said, "The court will examine the circumstantial evidence. Since the trial is going on, I do not want to elaborate on it further."
"I have become a villain. Yet my 28-year business profile will show that I am a clean businessman. I have contributed to the national economy. I have stakes in the oil, gas and power sectors. When a new government comes, it consults with me and I try to help it to bring in reforms. That is why it is not right to make me a villain," Azam said.

Hasina's trial to continue

SC overrules HC stay on the extortion case

UNB, Dhaka

The Supreme Court yesterday overruled a High Court order that had stalled the trial of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina in an extortion case.
A six-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Justice M Fazlul Karim, passed the order, granting the government's appeal against the High Court order.
The court also said the ongoing hearing of the writ petition filed by the Awami League president would continue as usual at the High Court.
Following a defence petition, the High Court on January 17 stayed the trial proceedings of the Tk 3 crore case until disposal of an HC ruling in which the court asked the government to explain why placing the extortion case under the Emergency Power Rules should not be declared to have been "without lawful authority".
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FROM LEFT... Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Bangladesh Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed smile at the end of "The Quest for Peace and Stability" session at the World Economic Forum in Davos yesterday.



Deck hands try to take their boat around a fire caused by a rupture in the underwater gas pipeline in a branch of the Turag at Amin Bazar yesterday.

Titas pipeline on blaze after hit by trawler

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A portion of an underwater gas pipeline on the bed of River Turag went up in flames yesterday at Aminbazar in Savar as the lower part of a cargo vessel pierced through it.
Gas transmission in parts of the capital was disrupted following the accident.
Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd personnel with the help of Fire Service and Civil Defence divers tried to restore the damaged pipeline last night. But their attempts failed and they would resume their job today, fire brigade sources said last night.

The pipeline is about 12 feet under water in the Turag and the damaged portion is about six to eight inches in diameter, said Abul Khair, one of the fire service divers, adding that the damaged portion has to be cut off and replaced with a new section of pipe.
The fire died down at around 1:00pm after the Titas Gas authorities turned off the supply of gas through the pipeline from Ashulia to Aminbazar.
Residents living in parts of Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Agargaon and Aminbazar areas in the city said they experienced low pressure of gas following the supply shutdown.
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BORO RICE CULTIVATION Farmers to get cash subsidy for irrigation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is going to provide the Boro farmers with money for buying diesel for irrigation in its effort to make sure that this year's Boro production target could be achieved.
The initiative, first of its kind, seeks to help the Boro farmers in cutting down their irrigation expenditures and ensure smooth production.
Starting from mid-March, the government is going to disburse Tk 750 crore as diesel subsidy, officials concerned said at a press conference yesterday.
The production target of Boro

for this year is set at 1.75 crore metric tons.
A committee comprising 30 officials from agriculture ministry and led by a joint secretary is also formed for monitoring Boro production in 64 districts.
Agriculture Secretary MA Aziz and Power Secretary Fouzul Kabir Khan spoke at the press conference held at the Press Information Department (PID) auditorium.
Aziz said that the government has already started listing the Boro farmers who are in most need of the subsidy.
The field officers of agriculture department have been working in

CA says talks soon with parties on polls

UNB, Zurich

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed has said the government will soon sit with political parties to discuss holding of free, fair and credible elections, and strengthening the foundation of democracy.
"Dialogue is essential... Beyond political parties, we will also hold dialogue with representatives of the civil society, professional groups and media who are speaking about transition to democracy," he said at a meeting with members of the Bangladesh community at Grand Hotel Quellenhof at Bad Ragaz on Wednesday afternoon.
Foreign Adviser Iftokhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Bangladesh Permanent Representative to UN offices in Geneva Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya and Chief Adviser's

Move on to address religious extremism

Microcredit, non-formal edn underway to attain economic stability, CA tells world leaders

UNB, Davos, Switzerland
Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed appraised a world meet in Davos, Switzerland yesterday of a quiet social change underway in Bangladesh to attain economic stability through microcredit and non-formal education to address the issue of religious extremism and suicide bombings.
"Bangladesh is a peaceful country—society must be inclusive in economic and political terms and sense of belonging must be generated for ensuring peace against extremism," he said during a plenary session on "The Quest for Peace and Stability" of the World Economic Forum at the Congress Centre in the Swiss city.
Fakhruddin, who was one of five top-brass panellists, said the caretaker government caught extremist elements, opened suicide-bombing cases and punished the culprits.
"Not a single bullet was fired, not a single bomb went off during this government," he told the gathering of global leaders, adding that people want a change in Bangladesh.
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City shivers in cold, drizzle

STAR REPORT

Mist enveloped the capital as cold winds coupled with drizzle yesterday disrupted city life causing sufferings to the street people.
The sun did not come out even for once while many city dwellers opted to stay indoors.
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Bird flu poses global threat; requires strong control efforts

Says FAO

STAR REPORT
Recent avian influenza outbreaks in 15 countries demonstrate that the H5N1 strain of the virus remains a global threat and requires close monitoring and strong control efforts.
A FAO press release yesterday said since December 2007, Bangladesh, Benin, China, Egypt, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Myanmar, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and Vietnam have confirmed new H5N1 outbreaks in poultry stocks. Except for a few cases in wild birds in China, Poland and United Kingdom, most of the confirmed outbreaks occurred in domestic poultry, including chickens, turkeys, geese and ducks.
"Globally, much progress has been achieved in keeping the H5N1 avian influenza virus under control. We are better prepared today to deal with the disease than we were three years ago," said FAO's Chief Veterinary Officer Joseph Domenech.
"Surveillance, early detection and immediate response have

DU teachers cancel protest programme

Classes, exams resume

DU CORRESPONDENT
The teachers of Dhaka University (DU) yesterday cancelled their protest programmes of wearing black badges and hoisting black flags on the campus as all their detained colleagues and students have been released.
This apparently brought normalcy to the campus and classes of different faculties and institutions and examinations were held on schedule.
VC Prof SMA Faiz said a meeting of the deans' committee would be held tomorrow to discuss the stalled admission tests.
All the four detained teachers and eight students arrested following violence on and around the DU campus last August were released

Nizami, Mojahid face murder charge



COURT CORRESPONDENT
A freedom fighter (FF) yesterday filed a murder case against Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami, Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mojahid, five of their party men and three non-Bangalees for the massacre of 345 people during the Liberation War.
Mohammad Amir Hossain Mollah, a wounded FF and resident of Pallabi's Duaripara, filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka.
The complainant stated that the Jamaat men killed them in the capital's Mirpur area. The victims included 21 of his relatives, one colleague, 43 locals of Mirpur and 280 others from different areas of the country on April 24 and December 18 in 1971, he said.
Meanwhile, another case was filed against Nizami, Mojaheed and seven other party men with

Hasina should be freed immediately

Zillur says

UNB, Dhaka
Awami League (AL) Acting President Zillur Rahman yesterday said our party chief should be released immediately after the confession of Azam J Chowdhury that he had not filed any extortion case against Sheikh Hasina.
"There is no witness to the extortion case filed against our leader. We have been saying from the beginning that she is completely innocent. It will be injustice to keep her in detention anymore," Zillur said.
He was talking with reporters when Awami League Jeddah unit handed over a cheque for Tk 10 lakh to the party's central relief fund.
"Sheikh Hasina has been implicated in false and conspiratorial