New York rape case against former IMF chief collapses

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Dominique Strauss-Kahn, former head of the International Monetary Fund, was released without bail Friday after a court hearing at which the rape case against him appeared to collapse. Prosecutors admitted that the credibility of the woman who is the complaining witness is now in question.

The prosecutors gave no details at the hearing, but a long article in the *New York Times*, published Friday morning, included quotes from two unnamed "law enforcement officials" suggesting that the alleged rape victim had been linked to drug dealing and money laundering and had been overheard discussing how she might benefit financially from the charges against Strauss-Kahn.

All three daily newspapers published in New York City—the tabloid *Daily News* and the Murdoch-owned *New York Post*—carried exposés Friday based on disclosures from the district attorney's office and the police. The same set of facts was reported by all three papers.

According to these accounts, the 32-year-old immigrant woman from Guinea who alleged she had been raped by Strauss-Kahn May 14 made a phone call less than a day later to a man in jail on drug charges, discussing how she could "cash in" on the case, as the *Daily News* put it.

The *Times* account reads: "The woman had a phone conversation with an incarcerated man within a day of her encounter with Mr. Strauss-Kahn in which she discussed the possible benefits of pursuing the charges against him. The conversation was recorded."

The *Times* reported that the jailed man was one of several people who had made cash deposits totaling more than $100,000 into the woman's bank account over the last two years in Arizona, Georgia, New York and Pennsylvania. She is a low-paid hotel maid with two children who would have been in no position to obtain such sums through her employment at Sofitel in Manhattan, where the encounter with Strauss-Kahn took place.

Another suggestive fact was that the alleged victim was paying hundreds of dollars a month in phone charges to five different companies, although she had told investigators she had only one phone. She also claimed she knew nothing about the huge cash deposits into her accounts except that they were made by her "fiancé" and his "friends."

The press reports also detail previous lies by the woman, including in her application for asylum after entering the United States, when she claimed to be a victim of gang rape in Guinea, the former French colony in West Africa where she was born.

NBC News reported that investigators had determined that in the application "she lied extensively, including information about a claim of having been raped." Prosecutors told the network she had described the story of being raped in Guinea "in a believable way," then later admitted that "she lied to them…and on the application about the whole rape claim."

An unnamed "law enforcement official" told the Associated Press that the woman had also lied about some of her activities during the time before and immediately after the alleged attack, which took place around noon in the luxury suite where Strauss-Kahn was staying in Manhattan.

The *Times* account emphasized the collapse of the credibility of the alleged rape victim. "Although forensic tests found unambiguous evidence of a sexual encounter" with Strauss-Kahn, the newspaper wrote, "prosecutors now do not believe much of what the accuser has told them about the circumstances or about herself. Since her initial allegation on May 14, the accuser has repeatedly lied, one of the law enforcement officials said."

Prosecutors met with lawyers for Strauss-Kahn on Thursday and turned over much of the evidence they had

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uncovered. They began discussions about a possible disposition of the case, beginning with the release of Strauss-Kahn from the house arrest to which he has been confined.

The next day, Justice Michael Obus declared at the court hearing, “I understand that the circumstances of this case have changed substantially and I agree the risk that he would not be here has receded quite a bit. I release Mr. Strauss-Kahn at his own recognizance.”

After the hearing, an official letter of disclosure from the New York district attorney’s office to Strauss-Kahn’s defense team was made public. The letter provides further details about the unreliability of the testimony of the alleged victim.

It concedes that the alleged victim repeatedly lied about the circumstances of the purported assault and her conduct afterwards. In particular, she now admits that after a sexual encounter with Strauss-Kahn in his room, Suite 2806 of Sofitel Manhattan, she went on to clean an adjacent suite, then returned to Strauss-Kahn’s suite and began to clean that as well before going to her supervisor to report that she had been sexually assaulted. Previously, the woman had said that she fled Suite 2806 and waited in a public hallway area until Strauss-Kahn left the hotel, and then reported the attack.

The apparent collapse of the case against Strauss-Kahn is a devastating exposure of the politically motivated media frenzy that followed his arrest. This was led by the *New York Times*, which featured columns by Maureen Dowd, Stephen Clarke and Jim Dwyer pouring contempt on such quaint notions as “innocent until proven guilty,” and then a long *New York Times Magazine* article by Bill Keller, the outgoing executive editor of the newspaper, denouncing as a “conspiracy theory” any suggestion that Strauss-Kahn could have been the target of a politically motivated frame-up.

It is not yet possible to determine whether the encounter with the hotel maid was a deliberate set-up, as many supporters of Strauss-Kahn in France have suggested. But the time sequence from his arrest onwards makes it clear that, at a minimum, the case was manipulated to accomplish political goals.

Strauss-Kahn was arrested May 14, but within a day, i.e., sometime on May 15, police and prosecutors were aware that the complaining witness was in discussions with a jailed drug trafficker about how she could profit from the hugely publicized rape case. Yet they pushed ahead with the case as though it were rock-solid.

Assistant District Attorney Artie McConnell, speaking at Strauss-Kahn’s arraignment in criminal court on May 16, declared, “The victim provided very powerful details consistent with violent sexual assault committed by the defendant, which establishes all the necessary elements of the crime he is charged with.”

On May 19, McConnell declared at a bail hearing, “The complainant in this case has offered a compelling and unwavering story about what occurred in the defendant’s room.”

Under the pressure of criminal prosecution and a media frenzy, Strauss-Kahn resigned as managing director of the IMF on May 19. He had to abandon his expected political course—returning to France during the summer and launching a campaign for the presidency, where he was the favorite for the Socialist Party nomination and the early leader in polls matching him against the unpopular right-wing incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy.

It seems likely that the New York district attorney’s office proceeded aggressively with the case, despite having a clear warning of the unreliability of its sole witness, in order to force Strauss-Kahn to give up his position at the IMF and torpedo his political plans in France. Over previous months, the Obama administration had expressed frustration with Strauss-Kahn’s stewardship of the IMF, including his reluctance to back Washington’s drive to isolate China and cast it as a “currency manipulator” because it was resisting US demands that it sharply revalue its currency.

Within days of Strauss-Kahn’s arrest, the US Treasury Secretary called publicly for his resignation, paving the way for the reins of the organization to be handed over on a temporary basis to his American deputy, John Lipsky.

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