

IMRAN KHAN INJURED, DOCTORS ORDER REST AHEAD OF SATURDAY'S ELECTION

Yesterday, former cricket star Imran Khan was injured when he fell off a lift that was raising him and a number of bodyguards to an elevated stage for a rally in Lahore. Prior to the injury, Khan and his PTI party were seen as slightly trailing former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his PMN-L party for Saturday's first-ever election in Pakistan after a civilian government (Asif Ali Zardari's PPP party) has successfully completed a five year term in office. Pakistan's Dawn News paints Khan's injuries as serious while the Express Tribune downplays the seriousness.

Here is Dawn's description of the fall and injuries:

Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan Tuesday sustained serious injuries on his head and back after falling from a lifter during climbing up the stage installed for an election rally in Lahore.

TV footage showed him tumbling down along with three or four personal body guards on a pick up truck. The PTI chief was seen bleeding when he was taken away by his party supporters to the city's Liberty Hospital.

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Khan sustained injuries on his head and back, said the hospital sources. They also said that Khan had to have as many as 16 stitches due to the injuries he sustained at back of his head.

The Express Tribune, meanwhile, claims the injuries are not serious:

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan will not attend a public meeting in Islamabad on Thursday (May 9).

Additional Information Secretary PTI Lahore Umar Khan, while talking to APP, said Imran Khan's condition was not serious but he had been advised bed rest by doctors for a week.

This same article describes what appears to be spinal fractures but no damage to the spinal cord:

Listing Khan's injuries from a CT scan present at the briefing Dr Sultan clarified that Khan did not suffer from a skull fracture as reports in the media suggested.

"There was a small scalp hematoma, which is just a collection of blood. There was the spinous process of C3, which was a minimally displaced fracture at the tip of C3 and a compression fracture of T6 (thoracic vertebrae). There is also a fracture of T5 vertebrae body and the spinous process. However, the most important and reassuring thing is that the spinal canal is intact and Mr Khan is in full control of his limbs and body functions. There was no neurological compromise."

Three separate spinal fractures would qualify in my book as serious but perhaps the finding of no skull fracture or neurological damage allows the claim that the injuries are not serious.

This long article by Reuters this morning describes how the military is watching the process of transition of civilian governments with a likely preference for Khan's party to win. Dawn is generally seen as more aligned with

the military than the Express Tribune, so their emphasis on seriousness for the injuries may be a play for sympathy. On the other hand, perhaps the Express Tribune is downplaying the seriousness of the injuries in a move to emphasize that there should be no impact from these injuries on Khan's ability to serve in office should his party win the election. It is also possible that Dawn is merely using the natural human reaction to this sort of injury to describe it as serious while the Express Tribune is relying on language from doctors describing Khan's condition in strictly medical terms, where "serious" has a specific meaning that does not seem to be met by Khan's injuries.

Sharif has called a halt, at least for today, to his campaign out of sympathy for Khan and his followers.

Khan's injury is a huge development coming only five days before the election. Imagine if Mitt Romney had been hospitalized with three spinal fractures just five days before the election here. There appears to be room for a significant move toward Khan partly out of sympathy for his injuries. Pew released a poll (pdf) from Pakistan yesterday and we see that prior to the injury, both Sharif and Khan had very favorable views by the public. Sharif had a favorable view from 66% of those polled and unfavorable from 26%. Khan trailed just a bit in those viewing him favorably, at 60%, but he had only 17% viewing him unfavorably. Sharif had only 8% who couldn't decide if they viewed him favorably or unfavorably, while there were 24% in this category for Khan. One would think that a significant portion of those without an opinion on Khan prior to yesterday's incident would tend toward viewing him a favorably sympathetic light. By contrast, Zardari rated 83% unfavorable and only 14% favorable, so Pakistanis clearly want their government to change.

The Pew poll also showed that Pakistanis have a very low opinion of the US, Obama and US

policies. The US scored a 72% unfavorable and Obama got 52% “no confidence”. Removing US troops from Afghanistan is seen as good by 66% and bad by only 6%. And then there are the drones:

American drone attacks against extremist leaders are largely unpopular. Roughly two-in-three Pakistanis (68%) oppose U.S. drone strikes. Opinions are divided on whether the strikes are being conducted with (29%) or without (39%) the approval of the Pakistani government. Similarly, there is division over whether drone attacks may be necessary to defend Pakistan from extremist groups – a third agree with this position, while 40% disagree. When asked about the consequences of drone strikes in general, roughly three-in-four (74%) say they kill too many innocent people.

We can rest assured that Joshua Foust and Christine Fair will inform us today or tomorrow that this poll by Pew is fatally flawed and can't possibly reflect the true status of Pakistanis' adoration of our glorious drones.