

ZARDARI RELEASED FROM HOSPITAL, REMAINS IN DUBAI; MEMOGATE REPLY DELAYED

Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari was released from the hospital in Dubai on Wednesday, but has not returned to Pakistan. His reply to Pakistan's Supreme Court investigation into the Memogate scandal had been expected today, but could be submitted tomorrow since the deadline has been extended.

Reuters gives us details on Zardari's release from the hospital:

"President Zardari has been discharged from the hospital and he has moved to his residence in Dubai," presidential spokesman Farhatullah Babar said.

The article also has more information on the ongoing question of whether Zardari suffered a stroke:

Zardari's office had released a statement earlier on Wednesday from his doctor saying the president had been admitted to hospital with numbness and twitching in his left arm and had lost consciousness for a few seconds.

"All investigations are within normal range and he was kept for observation for a few more days," Khaldoun Taha said, adding that Zardari would now rest at home and continue with his regular heart medications.

Zardari likely suffered a transient ischemic attack, senior sources in Zardari's party said last week, an ailment that can produce stroke-like

symptoms but no lasting damage to the brain.

Admitting to a TIA appears to thread the needle nicely in providing a few symptoms consistent with the widespread rumors of a stroke while avoiding any long-term stroke damage which would be obvious should Zardari return to public life. With Zardari now out of the hospital, his need for “rest” begins to look more suspicious, especially with the rest taking place in Dubai. I’m having a hard time seeing how Zardari can take two weeks of rest outside the country at a time when such crucial questions are facing Pakistan’s government and then come back and resume his duties.

One immediate crisis facing Zardari is the investigation into Memogate being carried out by the Supreme Court. A very short article in Dawn on the filing of responses in the investigation tells us that Zardari’s response is delayed:

Attorney General, Maulvi Anwarul Haq on Thursday said that the Army chief and DG ISI are to submit their statements by today. However, President Zardari will not file his reply today, DawnNews reported.

According to the AG, the 15-day deadline given to party members to respond to the memogate case will end tomorrow.

Earlier this morning, three legal experts from the Army Head Quarters delivered the Army chief’s reply and are still in attendance at the Attorney General’s office with the proposed documents.

The Express Tribune fills in more details on the filings and the uncertainty regarding the deadline:

Speaking to *TheExpress Tribune*, AG Haq said that the replies from Chief of Army

Staff General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani and Inter-Services Intelligence Director General Lt Shuja Ahmed Pasha will be submitted today.

Haq, who is responsible for submitting the replies on behalf of Zardari, Pasha and Kayani, said that he would "try his best" to submit the replies today.

Contrary to the statement released by the SC that the deadline ends today, the AG said that he had one more day to submit the replies and that he was in the process of filing replies on behalf of Kayani and Pasha.

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During the last hearing, the court had sought written replies from President Asif Ali Zardari, Kayani, Inter-Services Intelligence Director General Lt Shuja Pasha, former Ambassador to US Husain Haqqani, Pakistani-American businessman Mansoor Ijaz, and the foreign secretary.

It is quite interesting that one person has responsibility for filing the replies from parties who would appear to be on opposite sides of the controversy. It is also interesting that meetings are continuing between Army representatives and the AG, apparently to develop the final language that will go into Kayani's response. Finally, it is not entirely clear that Haq intends to file a response from Zardari when the two news reports are read together.

Meanwhile, in addition to his emailed filing of over 80 pages in the Memogate investigation, Mansoor Ijaz continues to stir the pot, granting an interview with a blogger in which he claims that ISI chief Pasha visited a number of Arab governments in May to discuss a possible coup:

A blog posting on Independent's website quoted Mansoor Ijaz as having said:

“that their (US intelligence) information was that Pasha had travelled to a few of the Arab countries to talk about what would be necessary to do in the event they had to remove Zardari from power and so forth.”

/snip/

The claim about Gen Pasha talking to Arab leaders about the coup is per se not new. There is a reference to this effect in the so-called transcript of Blackberry messenger conversations between Husain Haqqani and Mansoor Ijaz.

The latter had supposedly sent a message to Mr Haqqani: “I was just informed by senior US intel that GD-SII (read DG-ISI) Mr P asked for, and received permission, from senior Arab leaders a few days ago to sack Z.”

However, this message did not attract attention until Mr Ijaz explained its context in an interview with the Independent blogger. He claimed that this information was shared with him by a senior US intelligence official when he sought to confirm through CIA if Mr Zardari was really facing threat from the military.

It would seem that Mr. Ijaz is not yet satisfied that he has spent enough time dominating the headlines. With Zardari still “resting” in Dubai, the deadline for responses in the Supreme Court investigation shifting and the Army apparently in negotiations with the Attorney General over the wording of Kayani’s response, further meddling by Ijaz can only be seen as an attempt to bring the crisis to the next level.