



News | Politics

Bangladesh president orders release of ex-PM Khaleda Zia

The order for Zia's release comes hours after her archrival Sheikh Hasina resigned as prime minister and fled Bangladesh.



Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia [File: Andrew Biraj/Reuters]

5 Aug 2024



Bangladesh's President Mohammed Shahabuddin has ordered the release of jailed former prime minister and key opposition leader [Khaleda Zia](#), hours after her archrival Sheikh Hasina was [ousted](#) and fled the country.

The president's press team said in a statement on Monday that a meeting led by Shahabuddin had "decided unanimously to free Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia immediately".

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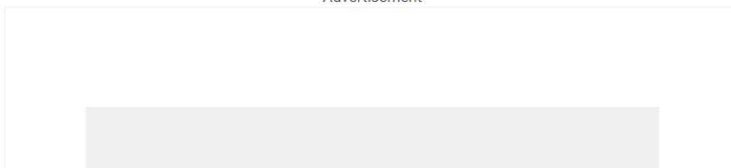
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Army chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman, along with the head of the navy and air force, and top leaders of several opposition parties, including the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami party, attended the president's meeting.

Zia, 78 and twice the prime minister of Bangladesh, is in poor health and confined to hospital after she was sentenced to 17 years in prison for corruption in 2018.

She shares a long-standing rivalry with Hasina, and was accused of misusing her power by embezzling some \$250,000 in donations meant for an orphanage trust.

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The BNP has said the cases were fabricated and aimed at keeping Zia away from politics, allegations denied by Hasina's government.

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“The meeting has also decided to free all the people who have been arrested during the student protests,” the president’s statement added.

More than 2,000 people had been arrested since last month during deadly street protests over a government job quota that soon transformed into a nationwide call for Hasina to [quit office](#).

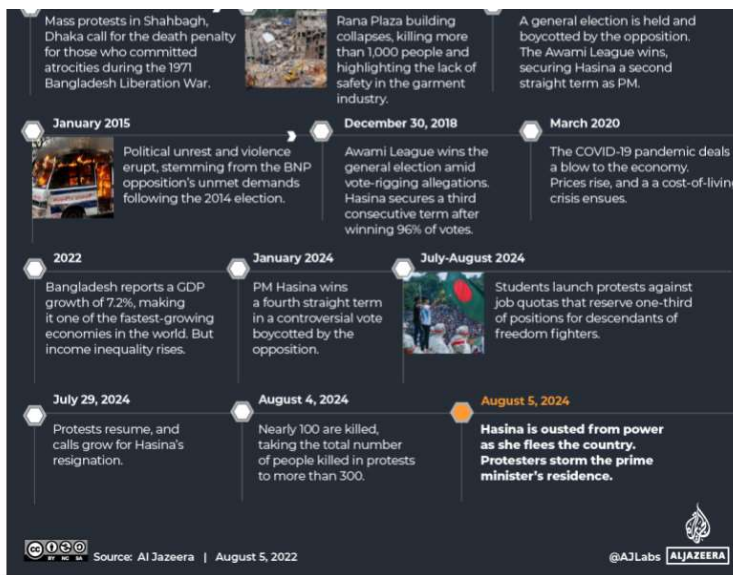
Nearly 300 people were killed in weeks of protests that the authorities sought to crush. A night of deadly violence on Sunday killed close to 100 and a curfew to quash protests was called.

Earlier on Monday, General Waker-Uz-Zaman said an interim government would be formed and the deaths in the course of the [weeks-long protests](#) would be investigated.

“I promise you all we will bring justice to all the murders and injustice. We request you to have faith in the army of the country. I take full responsibility, and I assure you to not get disheartened,” the general said.

BANGLADESH
Sheikh Hasina ousted after 15 years of rule
Hasina became Bangladesh's prime minister for the first time after her Awami League party won the 1996 elections. Her second stint in power, which began in 2009, was marked by impressive economic growth. But she was accused of turning authoritarian and cracking down on dissent.

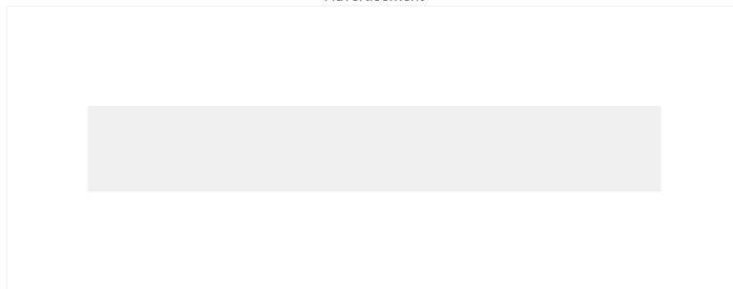
December 29, 2008 Awami League wins the general election and Sheikh Hasina becomes PM for a second term.	February 2009 Bangladesh Rifles revolt. Government restores order, but more than 74 people are killed.	June 2011 15th Amendment to the Constitution is passed, removing the caretaker government system meant to conduct elections.
February 2013	October 2013	January 5, 2014



The military also said it would lift the curfew at dawn on Tuesday and open offices, factories, schools, and colleges from 6am on Tuesday (00:00 GMT).

Reporting from Dhaka, Al Jazeera’s Tanvir Chowdhury said that despite the violence, arrests and curfew, people on the streets were jubilant over Hasina’s exit.

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“Just a few minutes ago, an army patrol told protesters to go home, that the army was with them and that they should let the roads clear. They were saying the protesters were all protected and not to worry. But people are still planning to stay on the streets even though it’s not as crowded,” he said.

Chowdhury added that what happens next in the country “depends on how the interim government is formed, who its members are and how acceptable they are to the public”.

The military has a “very tough job ahead,” Irene Khan, a UN special rapporteur, told Al Jazeera.

“We are all hoping that the transition would be peaceful and that there will be accountability for all the human rights violations that have taken place.”

