



BBC News By Moazzem Hossain in Dhaka

Bangladesh's former military ruler General Ershad has returned to Dhaka, ending an apparent four and a half month self-exile in London.

He is due in court on Sunday where he is accused of being involved in the murder of an army general.

General Ershad, who ruled Bangladesh for nine years, left Bangladesh immediately after general elections last year in which a four party coalition led by Khaleda Zia won a massive victory.

It is widely believed that General Ershad left the country fearing harassment and arrest by the new government.

'No deal'

Several hundred supporters greeted General Ershad at the international airport in Dhaka when he arrived in a flight from the eastern Indian city of Calcutta.

General Ershad said he went to London for better medical treatment and from there he travelled to India to visit the shrine of a Muslim saint.

Political observers believe General Ershad might choose a path of non-confrontation with the government.

General Ershad dismissed speculation that he returned home after a secret deal with the government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

During the rule of the previous Awami League government, General Ershad forged an electoral alliance with Khaleda Zia, then the opposition leader.

However he broke from the alliance several months before the elections and contested the polls separately.

But his party fared poorly, winning only 14 parliamentary seats, less than half its previous tally.

Jail term

The coalition accused General Ershad of betrayal.

There are more than a dozen cases of corruption against General Ershad, many of which are now being heard in court.

He has already served a five-year jail term in a corruption case.

A district court in Dhaka ordered him to appear before a court on Sunday in a murder case.

General Ershad is one of the accused in the killing of an army general who led a military coup in

1981.

Political observers believe General Ershad might choose a path of non-confrontation with the government to avoid arrest and harassment.

General Ershad told journalists at the airport that his party would not boycott the parliament and would play a constructive role in the parliament.

The 72-year-old former president also dismissed speculation that he would retire from politics.