

**Speech of Dr. Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, Chief Justice of Bangladesh on
National Seminar on Judicial Independence and Efficiency jointly Organised
by the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and UNDP**

Venue: InterContinental, Date: 22 June 2025

**Hon'ble Chief Guest of National Seminar on Judicial Independence and
Efficiency H.E. Professor Dr Muhammad Yunus, Hon'ble Chief Adviser**

Hon'ble Law Adviser,

**Hon'ble Judges of Appellate Division and High Court Division of the Supreme
Court of Bangladesh**

Learned Attorney general for Bangladesh

Learned Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners,

Chief of military, Navy and Airforce

Resident Representative of UNDP

Learned Vice Chairman, Bangladesh Bar Council,

Learned President of SCBA,

Secretaries of different ministries and Divisions,

Learned District Judges and Chief Judicial Magistrates 64 districts,

Learned Metropolitan Sessions Judges and Chief Metropolitan Magistrates,

Members of Supreme court Registry,

Members of Print and Electronic media,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good Afternoon

In the blazing months of July and August 2024, a student-led revolution, born of anguish, not ambition, swept across Bangladesh, demanding justice and integrity. That historic revolution dismantled a compromised judiciary and called forth a new

order grounded in truth and independence. I did not assume the office of the 25th Chief Justice by design, but was summoned by the people's will, entrusted with the solemn duty to restore faith in the rule of law and to rebuild the judiciary as a pillar of constitutional democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The revolution did not end with slogans, it demanded a moral reckoning and the reconstruction of our very statehood. As the old order gave way, the nation turned not to power, but to principle. In that defining moment, Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus, our Nobel Laureate and global symbol of justice, was summoned by the people to guide a fractured nation toward renewal. His assumption of office as Chief Adviser marked a turning point. With moral clarity and solid purpose, he charted a path of transformation through six foundational commissions, placing judicial reform at the forefront.

Excellency Chief Adviser and distinguished guests,

On 21 September 2024, I stood before the judiciary to unveil the Judicial Reform Roadmap, a declaration not of intent, but of institutional transformation grounded in independence, accountability, and service. Central to this roadmap is the creation of a Supreme Court Secretariat to ensure administrative and financial autonomy, alongside a depoliticized guideline on postings and a proposal for separate civil and criminal trial courts to enhance adjudicatory clarity. Institutional safeguards, such as enhanced allowances, car loans, and security measures for judges, were introduced not as privileges, but as protections of judicial integrity. Complementing these structural reforms, I issued twelve directives targeting procedural efficiency and corruption, including helplines, a nationwide digital

complaint mechanism, and avenues for public redress. These initiatives are restoring public trust by dismantling a culture of silence and replacing it with one of service.

Distinguished Guests,

A judiciary cannot claim true independence unless the appointment and accountability of its highest members are structurally shielded from political influence. With the Supreme Judicial Council now restored as the guardian of judicial discipline following the disposal of the Review of the 16th Amendment case, we have also taken a forward-looking step by establishing the Supreme Judicial Appointment Council, a collegium-based body ensuring that apex court appointments are guided by merit, transparency, and integrity. This proposal, endorsed by the Judicial Reform Commission and swiftly operationalized through an ordinance approved by the interim Government under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Adviser, Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus, has already borne fruit. The two most recent Judges elevated to the Appellate Division were appointed under this process, setting a new standard of legitimacy. A fresh round of appointments is now under consideration, reinforcing that judicial elevation shall henceforth be grounded in public trust and institutional dignity. I am deeply grateful to the Honourable Law Adviser for his instrumental role, and I firmly believe that the Supreme Judicial Council and the Supreme Judicial Appointment Council now stand as twin pillars of judicial independence, ensuring accountability on one hand and principled selection on the other.

Hon'ble Chief Adviser,

At the heart of our judiciary's strength is the firm dedication of nearly 2,000 Judges and Magistrates across Bangladesh, including over 1,200 young judges aged between 24 and 35, an extraordinary reservoir of talent and idealism. Among them, 625 are women, constituting more than 31 percent of the judicial service, all recruited solely on merit. Their presence is not symbolic but transformative, bringing empathy, inclusivity, and intellectual rigour to our courts, and reshaping the culture of justice delivery. Despite logistical constraints and limited infrastructure, these judges, especially in 36 districts where case disposal has surpassed new filings over the past ten months, have demonstrated that reform is not a distant promise but a present reality. With over 4.2 million pending cases nationwide, their innovation, commitment, and resilience, working into evenings and weekends, stand as compelling proof that the judiciary is not just adapting, it is leading a generational shift driven by merit, youth, and purpose.

Ladies and gentlemen,

No reform of this scale can thrive in isolation, it has been sustained by a powerful alignment of national and international partnership. The UNDP has stood at the forefront, turning vision into reality through wholehearted support, including a transformative study visit to South Africa, co-organised with the Commonwealth Secretariat, where we drew inspiration from their model of reconciliation and justice. That journey deepened our understanding of justice as not just adjudication, but restoration. Just few hours back, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Sweden and UNDP to launch a 24x7 judicial helplinean essential step toward citizen access and institutional responsiveness. The European Union, working closely with UNDP, is also advancing our digital legal aid services, creating a justice system that is both accessible and technology-driven. To take this spirit across the nation, I have led reform roadshows in all

eight divisions, where judges, magistrates, bar associations, and citizens have actively engaged with the reform agenda. With the vital support of the Judicial Service Association and our development partners- Sweden, the EU, the UK, and UNDP, these efforts are shaping a judiciary that reaches out, not waits, and that serves not in abstraction, but in close communion with the people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I conclude, allow me to place on record my profound gratitude to all who have sustained and enriched our collective journey. My special gratitude to the Honourable **Chief Adviser, Professor Dr. Muhammad Yunus**, whose visionary leadership has given both impetus and legitimacy to this reform endeavour. I am deeply indebted to him for his relentless support and guidance in this process of rebuilding of public trust. I am grateful to the Honourable **Law Adviser**, whose firm support steered every stage of our institutional redesign, and to the Honourable **Attorney General of Bangladesh**, whose steady counsel continues to fortify the dialogue between the Bench and the Bar. My appreciative thanks go to the Honourable **Judges of the Appellate Division and the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh**, whose wisdom, scholarship, and independence of mind inspire the judiciary to uphold its highest ideals. I also place on record my sincere thanks to the **Supreme Court Special Committee on Judicial Reform** for its methodical contributions to this transformative journey.

I extend my appreciation to the **Supreme Court Bar Association** and the **Bangladesh Bar Council**, whose enduring engagement remains vital to the cause of institutional balance. I especially acknowledge the leadership of the **Bangladesh Judicial Service Association**, representing a vibrant judges. I thank the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**, our trusted institutional partner and

co-host of this national seminar, for their support, and I warmly welcome and thank all members of the **diplomatic corps and our development partners**, whose presence today affirms the international community's faith in Bangladesh's judicial renewal.

Excellency Chief Adviser,

The **Judiciary today stands as the fully functioning constitutional organ of the State** unyielding in its duty, grounded in its independence, and stanch in its commitment to justice. Let it be clearly understood that the reform initiatives of the Interim Government under your leadership, noble and necessary as they are, **cannot be sustained without a full-fledged and institutionalised reform of the judiciary itself**. To that end, I reiterate with utmost urgency the need for establishing a **separate Secretariat for the judiciary**, which is essential not only for administrative autonomy but for securing the structural foundation upon which all other reforms must rest. Justice cannot be carried forward on borrowed infrastructure or delegated authority; it must stand on its own institutional legs. Together, let us ensure that the judiciary is not merely preserved, but empowered, renewed, and firmly established.

Thank you all