

Speech by the Chief Justice of Bangladesh

Occasion: Rajshahi University Law Alumni Association (RULAA) Council

Distinguished Members of the Rajshahi University Law Alumni Association,
Esteemed Members of the Supreme Court Bar Association
Honored Guests, and Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good evening.

It is both a privilege and an honor to stand before this illustrious gathering of legal minds, advocates of justice, and torchbearers of the legacy of the Rajshahi University Law Faculty. This institution has stood tall for decades, shaping individuals who have gone on to lead the nation, serve the public, and contribute to the pursuit of justice and equity in Bangladesh.

Honoring the Martyrs and the Spirit of Justice

As we gather today, let us pause to reflect on the sacrifices that shaped our national identity and aspirations. We remember the martyrs of the 1971 Liberation War, whose unparalleled courage laid the foundation for an independent and sovereign Bangladesh. We also honor the martyrs of the student-led revolution of July-August 2024, whose call for equality, equity, and human dignity resonates deeply. Their rallying cry, "*We want justice,*" still echoes in our pursuit of a fairer society, reminding us that justice is not merely a slogan but a guiding principle that must shape our work and lives.

The Enchanting Campus of Rajshahi University

Before delving into the heart of this discussion, I must take a moment to express my admiration for the compact yet vibrant campus of Rajshahi University. This campus, with its lush greenery, tranquil environment, and rich academic culture, has served as a cradle of knowledge and a sanctuary for critical thought. Its natural beauty inspires not just learning but a deep appreciation for harmony, resilience, and growth—the same qualities that define a just society.

Rajshahi University is not just a physical space; it is a legacy. Its halls and classrooms have nurtured some of the brightest luminaries in the nation's history—educators, jurists, statespersons, and human rights advocates. This institution is a beacon of excellence and a testament to the transformative power of education.

The Role of Supreme Court Lawyers in Promoting Rule of Law

Distinguished colleagues,

Among the many achievements of Rajshahi University, the contributions of its alumni to the judiciary and the legal profession stand out. Many of you here today, as advocates of the Supreme Court, are playing a pivotal role in promoting the rule of law and ensuring access to justice.

Lawyers are the frontline defenders of the Constitution and the rights it enshrines. Your advocacy in the Supreme Court helps set precedents that shape the law of the land. You represent the voiceless, champion the marginalized, and hold the powerful accountable. In doing so, you embody the principles instilled by this great institution: justice, equity, and an staunch commitment to truth.

As Supreme Court lawyers, you also act as bridges between the judiciary and the people. Your role extends beyond the courtroom; you educate citizens about their rights and responsibilities, empowering them to engage with the legal system. Your work ensures that the law is not an abstract concept but a living promise of fairness and equality for all.

A Journey of Responsibility and Vision

Distinguished presence,

When I had the distinct honor of taking the oath as the 25th Chief Justice of Bangladesh, I was acutely aware of the immense responsibility placed upon my shoulders. This role is not merely a position of leadership but a solemn trust bestowed by the people of this nation to uphold fairness, equity, and ensure access to justice for all, irrespective of their status or circumstances.

From the very moment of my appointment, I recognized the urgency of addressing the challenges that have long impeded the full realization of our judiciary's potential. To this end, on September 21, I unveiled a comprehensive Roadmap for Judicial Reform. This initiative is a cornerstone of my vision to strengthen our judiciary and its capacity to serve the people with integrity and efficiency.

Key Initiatives for Judicial Reform

As part of my steadfast commitment to institutional reform and strengthening the independence of the judiciary, I have taken decisive steps to establish the foundations for true separation of powers. I have declared and initiated the process of creating a separate Secretariat for the Judiciary, a pivotal measure to ensure the judiciary's administrative autonomy. Alongside this, I have proposed the formation

of a Judicial Appointment Council to institutionalize transparency and meritocracy in the appointment process of apex court judges, as well as Posting and Transfer Guidelines for District Judiciaries, aimed at fostering consistency and fairness in judicial postings. These proposals have been formally submitted to the government for necessary action, marking a significant step toward the complete institutional separation of the judiciary from the executive branch.

Moreover, in reinforcing the judiciary's independence from the legislative branch, we have restored and strengthened the Supreme Judicial Council following the disposal of the 16th Amendment review case. This pivotal move effectively eliminates the provision for Parliament to impeach Supreme Court judges, ensuring that the judiciary remains free from undue political influence. These measures collectively embody a holistic vision for safeguarding the independence and integrity of our judicial system, reflecting our firm commitment to uphold the principles of justice and the rule of law.

Expanding Access to Justice

Recognizing the critical importance of access to justice, I introduced a Capacity Test alongside the existing Means Test for invoking legal aid services. This reform was driven by the alarming reality that a significant number of individuals were being denied defense counsel in court, undermining their fundamental right to a fair trial. The Capacity Test assesses an individual's ability to navigate legal proceedings independently, ensuring that those who lack resources are provided with the support they need. This initiative marks a significant step forward in our reform efforts, as it expands the reach of legal aid services and reinforces our commitment to ensuring that no one is denied justice due to financial or practical constraints.

Honoring the Legacy of Dr. Shamsuzzoha

As we reflect on the legacy of Rajshahi University, one name that inevitably rises to the forefront is Dr. Shamsuzzoha, whose life and sacrifice have left an indelible mark on this institution and on the nation itself. Dr. Shamsuzzoha was more than an educator; he was a symbol of courage, selflessness, and the relentless pursuit of truth. His martyrdom during the tumultuous days of 1969 resonates deeply with the values we strive to uphold.

Dr. Shamsuzzoha's story has personal resonance for me, as he shared a profound connection with my family. My parents often spoke of him with reverence and admiration, recounting his dedication to his students and his indomitable spirit. His life serves as a reminder to all of us that the law is not just a profession; it is a calling to serve justice, even at great personal cost.

A Call to Action

As alumni of Rajshahi University, you carry the responsibility of upholding the ideals of justice, equality, and human rights. Your work as legal professionals, educators, and advocates plays a pivotal role in shaping a society rooted in fairness and the rule of law. It is imperative that we continue to use our knowledge, influence, and resources to champion the causes of the marginalized, strengthen the legal framework, and promote access to justice for all.

The legacy of this institution calls on each of us to lead by example, ensuring that the values we espouse are reflected in our actions. Whether in the courtroom, the

classroom, or the community, let us remain committed to building a society where justice is not a privilege but a universal right. Together, we have the power to transform challenges into opportunities and to pave the way for a future defined by equity and integrity.

Conclusion

As we conclude this gathering, I urge each of you to carry forward the legacy of Rajshahi University Law Faculty with pride and purpose. Let the memory of the martyrs and the sacrifices of the past inspire you to stand up for what is right, no matter the cost. Let the values you imbibed here guide you as you navigate the complexities of our legal system.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this esteemed gathering. May the Rajshahi University Law Alumni Association continue to grow in strength and influence, and may we all remain steadfast in our pursuit of justice.

Thank you.