

**Speech of Dr. Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Bangladesh on webinar titled Reimagining legal practice in Bangladesh amidst new global realities**

**Date: 14/05/2025**

Distinguished Chair, learned speakers, esteemed members of the International Bar Association, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening to you all.

It is with a profound sense of honour that I address this event organised under the banner of the International Bar Association, that, I am told, is the very first IBA webinar focused exclusively on Bangladesh. Allow me at the very outset to convey my sincere appreciation to the organisers for convening this timely and forward-looking initiative. At a time when the global legal profession is rapidly evolving, such engagements meaningfully contribute to strengthening the global legal fraternity.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Since assuming office as Chief Justice, I have pursued a transformative agenda for judicial reform, which is now entering a decisive phase of institutional entrenchment. On 21 September 2024, I declared a comprehensive Judicial Reform Roadmap, founded on the three pillars of judicial independence, administrative autonomy, and procedural efficiency. In furtherance of this vision, the Supreme Court has operationalized the Judicial Appointment Council and the Supreme Judicial Council, two autonomous bodies with exclusive authority to recruit and remove judges of the apex court fully insulated from executive and legislative

interference. The process for establishing a separate Secretariat for the Judiciary is nearing completion, setting the cornerstone for full administrative autonomy.

As part of my reform roadmap, I have also taken the initiative to establish dedicated commercial courts for swift and effective resolution of commercial disputes, with clearly defined scope and jurisdiction to ensure procedural efficiency and legal certainty. While the courts are yet to be established, formal proposals have been submitted, and the European Union, in particular, has expressed strong interest in supporting this reform. The EU's engagement highlights the initiative's potential to boost investor confidence and improve the overall business environment in Bangladesh.

### **Distinguished Participants,**

We are now at a historical juncture in legal practice globally and nationally. The boundaries of law are expanding in unprecedented ways. Globalisation has transformed how we interpret jurisdiction. Technology has redefined access to legal services. And most importantly, the expectations of justice have deepened demanding more transparency and inclusivity. Today, a lawyer is not merely an expert in statutes but a problem-solver across borders, a negotiator between traditions and innovations.

The rapid evolution of technology has undeniably reshaped modern society, with profound implications for legal and regulatory systems. As the world undergoes unprecedented change, we are confronted with new and complex problems that demand urgent attention. Government intervention, whether through policies or legislation, has become essential to address these challenges effectively. A pressing task before us is to design sophisticated legislative and regulatory mechanisms that balance three key priorities: the protection of individuals, the

preservation of traditional business interests, and the need to keep pace with constant disruptions driven by technological advancements, particularly AI. To achieve this balance, we must adopt robust mechanisms grounded in systemic thinking, well-established principles, and rigorous regulatory impact assessments (RIAs). These tools ensure that governments act thoughtfully and deliberately, rather than impulsively, in crafting regulations. In this regard, intellectual property law stands out as a key area requiring innovation and vigilance, especially in light of cross-border digital creativity and AI-generated content.

At the same time, I must emphasise that the Bar must go the extra length in asserting its rightful place as an equal stakeholder and partner in the judicial reform initiatives I have initiated. Indeed, the empowerment of the Bar is not a future aspiration, it is already visibly underway at the divisional and district levels. Local bars are increasingly taking charge, aligning themselves with the reform vision, and engaging in institutional dialogue. It is now incumbent upon the wider legal community to nurture this momentum and ensure that the spirit of reform penetrates all echelons of legal practice. This collective effort will greatly contribute to the sustainability of the reform roadmap I have set in motion as Chief Justice.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We must nurture a generation of legal professionals who are globally competent yet deeply grounded in local realities. I would urge our young lawyers and law students to embrace the habits of lifelong learning, to pursue comparative legal knowledge, and to uphold the highest standards of professional ethics and discipline.

It is also essential that we encourage leadership not just in courtrooms but in public discourse, academia, and policymaking. Law is not an isolated profession; it is the soul of society's conscience. As such, Bangladeshi lawyers must rise to the occasion by contributing meaningfully to regional and international legal developments.

In this regard, I wish to express my deep appreciation to the International Bar Association. The IBA has long served as a crucial bridge facilitating dialogue among jurists, promoting harmonisation of legal norms, and fostering a spirit of collegiality among legal professionals across jurisdictions. This webinar exemplifies that spirit. I encourage deeper participation by Bangladeshi lawyers, judges, and scholars in IBA's platforms, so that we may not only learn from others but also share our perspectives and experiences.

Let us also remember that international cooperation is not a luxury rather it is a necessity. Legal systems today are more interconnected than ever before. Challenges such as data protection, climate change litigation, international trade, and digital justice transcend borders. Platforms like this allow us to collectively examine these complexities and chart a more informed, ethical, and equitable path forward.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

I hope and trust that today's dialogue will be a call of future collaboration, innovation, and mutual growth. My expectation is that the discussions held here today inspire fresh thinking, strengthen professional bonds, and chart actionable pathways for the future of legal services in Bangladesh and beyond.

I once again thank the International Bar Association for their thoughtful initiative, the distinguished speakers for their invaluable time, and all participants for their commitment to advancing justice and the rule of law.

I hope that this event shall be enriching, insightful, and truly impactful.

Thank you.