

**Speech of Hon'ble Chief Justice of Bangladesh Dr. Syed Refaat Ahmed on the
Regional Seminar on Judicial Independence and Efficiency**

Date: 25/09/2025, Venue: Grand Park, Barishal

**Mr. Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury, Honourable Judge of the
Appellate Division, Supreme Court of Bangladesh**

H.E. Sarah Cooke, British High Commissioner to Bangladesh

H.E. Nicolas Weeks, Ambassador of Sweden to Bangladesh

H.E. Håkon Arald Gulbrandsen, Ambassador of Norway to Bangladesh

**H.E. Michael Miller, EU Ambassador and Head of Delegation to
Bangladesh**

Mr. Stefan Liller, Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh

Registrar General of Bangladesh Supreme Court

Senior District & Sessions Judge, Barishal

Members of the District Judiciaries of Barishal Division

President and Secretary of the Bangladesh Judicial Service Association

Learned members of the Barishal Bar Association

Esteemed Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon

It was though not here, one year ago, in the Inner Garden of our Supreme Court, that I stood before judges of the apex court of country and Judges of District Judiciaries and Magistracies to announce a roadmap. A roadmap which is designed to answer the voice of the people. That voice, resounding in July and August 2024, demanded that justice must be lived, visible, and felt.

Today, just as its first anniversary, I come up with gratitude, humility, and resolve. Gratitude, for the immense trust reposed in me; humility, in recognizing the unfinished task that lies ahead; and resolve, in declaring that the reform journey we began has not faltered but advanced with a determination nearing one hundred percent implementation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the outset, my purpose was singular; to restore the lost confidence of our people in their judiciary. This could not be achieved by rhetoric alone. It required tangible change, transparent systems, accountable institutions, and the moral courage to reform ourselves before reforming others.

Thus, on 21 September 2024, I pledged before the nation that judicial independence, efficiency, and institutional excellence would no longer remain distant aspirations. Instead, they would be converted into an actionable framework; short-term steps to heal the immediate wounds, medium-term measures to consolidate gains, and long-term structures to safeguard our future.

Over this past year, I am proud to say, the roadmap has been translated into lived reality. It has reshaped the culture of our courts, the expectations of our citizens, and the credibility of our institutions.

Distinguished Guests,

Allow me to recount a few landmarks in this journey:

Transparent Judicial Appointments:

For decades, jurists, scholars, and citizens alike voiced the universal demand for an open, credible, and collegium-based system of appointing judges to the apex court. That aspiration has now been realized through the enactment of the

Supreme Judicial Appointment Council Ordinance, 2025. This landmark legislation has created, for the first time in our history, a Supreme Judicial Appointment Council, a collegium entrusted to recommend candidates solely on the basis of merit, integrity, and efficiency. With the passage of this Ordinance, opacity has given way to institutional transparency, the once-closed corridors of judicial appointments are now illuminated by the principles of fairness and accountability. Already, two successful appointments (both Appellate Division and High Court Division) have been carried out under this framework, standing as concrete proof that a long-awaited national consensus has been translated into law, and that judicial independence is being fortified through a process worthy of public trust.

Institutional Separation:

The groundwork for a separate Supreme Court Secretariat is nearly complete. With active cooperation of the Interim Government and in compliance with constitutional obligations, we are moving towards ending dual administration over postings, transfers, and discipline. This will enshrine true autonomy, a structural correction long overdue.

Accountability and Integrity:

Through the revival of the *Supreme Judicial Council*, we have restored the constitutional mechanism for discipline and removal of the Supreme Court Judges which was absent for a decade. Several cases have already been addressed, proving that no robe shields one from accountability.

Technology and Access:

The introduction of two paper-free benches in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, digital filing in two Family Courts, and

nationwide helplines in all 64 districts has transformed the culture of justice delivery in Bangladesh. What was once a distant, bureaucratic process has now become more transparent, responsive, and accessible to ordinary citizens. The Supreme Court helplines, in particular, have emerged as a lifeline for litigants and service-seekers, ensuring that grievances are heard, information is available, and accountability is enforced. Reports in the national press testify to their growing use and effectiveness, highlighting how these channels are not symbolic, but actively reshaping the way justice is delivered. They have given people, for the first time, a direct line to the highest court of the land breaking down barriers of fear, distance, and delay.

Two Rules of 2025: Advancing Judicial Autonomy

Another milestone of the CJB's reform roadmap was reached with the promulgation of two seminal sets of Rules in 2025, the *Rules on Posting in the Law and Justice Division* and the *Rules on Judicial Service Construction*. Together, these Rules mark a decisive advance in consolidating the autonomy of the judiciary. For decades, Judges faced uncertainty and vulnerability arising from opaque or externally influenced processes of posting and dependent on creation of judges posts. By enacting clear, principled, and time-bound procedures, these Rules have placed the power of judicial career progression within a transparent institutional framework. Far from being a technical adjustment, these Rules of 2025 have broader visions as they affirm that the judiciary will govern its own house, administer its own service, and maintain integrity through self-regulation. In this respect, they are both fundamental legal achievement. Meanwhile, we have advanced reforms for *separating civil and criminal jurisdictions*, and expanded the district judiciary with 232 new posts. These are not cosmetic changes, they will directly address backlog, delay, and inefficiency.

Setting up a specialised commercial court

Ladies and gentlemen, Bangladesh's growing economy demands a justice system that can match its pace. Complex commercial disputes cannot remain entangled in the general docket; they require a dedicated forum with speed, skill, and certainty. It was with this vision that the Supreme Court, under my roadmap, prepared the draft *Commercial Court Ordinance, 2025*, a forward-looking framework shaped through research, consultation, and comparative study. The proposal, now placed before the Government, offers not only specialized courts but also streamlined procedures, trained judges, and technology-driven processes designed to deliver swift, predictable outcomes. In doing so, the judiciary has not waited for reform to arrive; it has designed reform and placed it at the nation's doorstep. This Ordinance, once enacted, will be a game-changer, unlocking confidence for investors and will strengthen Bangladesh's ease-of-business environment.

Each such step ladies and gentlemen, serves as a building block for structural reform, thereby, solidifying the essence of institutional autonomy

Judicial Diplomacy:

From Bangkok to Dubai, from Johannesburg to Sao Paulo, the judiciary of Bangladesh has carried the banner of reform and independence. In dialogue with Chief Justices worldwide, I have pledged that our judiciary shall not be parochial, it shall be comparative, open, and global in its vision.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, I stand in the presence of High Commissioner and ambassadors who have been persistent friends of our judiciary. Your Excellencies, your presence

is more than ceremonial. It is a declaration that Bangladesh does not walk this journey alone.

I extend heartfelt gratitude to the *European Union, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*. Your op-ed published this week is a demonstration to your faith in our transformation.

You have recognized that these reforms are not technical adjustments but structural corrections, laying the foundations of equity between the judiciary and the executive, as envisioned by our Constitution.

UNDP, our trusted co-host today, has been an anchor in this journey, from supporting regional roadshows on judicial independence, to digitization, to legal aid. Without your partnership, the reach and credibility of our reforms would be diminished.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We live in momentous times. Our own endeavours at reform and reinvention play out against shifts in geopolitics and geostrategy. Moving beyond the issue of the enforceability of international law and the many permutations of constitutionalism and constitutionality, great value is attached to law as a moral idea and to diplomacy's moral moorings. We, therefore, have a moral as well as a legal obligation to institute changes equally at municipal and global planes

Dear participant Judges,

This vision of reform calls for something beyond technical competence; it calls for judicial statesmanship. Our own history teaches us both the power and the perils of this role. There have been moments when the judiciary has been the only fully functioning organ of the State, standing as the last guardian of the Constitution. That legacy is a source of pride, but it is also a warning, when the

judiciary falters, through complacency within or compromise from without, the entire constitutional structure is imperilled. The measure of our statesmanship lies in our ability to protect the court's legitimacy by delivering justice that is principled yet sensitive to its reception, that is decisive yet mindful of its long-term consequences.

You Judges, are the first face of justice for most of our citizens. You shape the culture of your courts. You influence the standards of your local Bar. You decide whether justice in your jurisdiction will be swift or sluggish, accessible or remote. The reform we have embarked upon will succeed or fail in large measure because of the choices you make when you leave this hall.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One year ago, I held up a mirror to our judiciary. Today, I hold up a window, through which the people of Bangladesh may glimpse a judiciary that is transparent, efficient, independent, and accountable. We are not yet at the destination, but we are far along the road. And when future generations ask whether we chose reform in deed or in word, may they find in this year's record the answer, we chose reform in deed.

Thank you.