

**Speech of Dr. Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, the Chief Justice of  
Bangladesh on the felicitation programme of SCBA on being  
conferred a lifetime Honorary Fellowship by  
Wadham College, Oxford University.**

**Date: 28/05/2025, Venue: SCBA Auditorium**

**The Chair of today's programme, Mr. A.M.  
MahubUddinKhokon, President of the SCBA**

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

**Learned Attorney General for Bangladesh**

**Mr. Muhammad JamiruddinSircar**

**ZainulAbedin, learned Vice Chairman of Bangladesh Bar Council**

**MahfuzurRahmanMilon, learned Secretary of the SCBA**

**Learned Lawyers& Distinguished**

**Members of Supreme Court Registry**

**Members of the Print and Electronic media**

**Distinguished guests**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

**Good Evening**

Let me start by saying that this evening is deeply personal. It is personal not because it marks a milestone in an individual's life, but because it reflects a collective reckoning of truth, struggle, and the unfinished promise of justice in our nation's history. I am humbled, beyond words, to stand before you as the 25th Chief Justice of Bangladesh, honouredby my Alma Mater University of

Oxford an institution whose legacy is rooted in moral inquiry, legal philosophy, and the fearless defence of liberty.

But this evening is not about me. It is about us. It is about how we arrived here. It is about why this honour belongs not merely to an individual, but to a nation that chose justice over tyranny, truth over deceit, and reform over silence.

We must speak of July and August 2024, the months that shook our nation's collective conscience. When lawlessness spread like wildfire, when state institutions were captured including the judiciary and repurposed to serve a narrow few, when the cries of the oppressed echoed louder than court judgments, the people took to the streets. In every square of Dhaka, in every nook & cranny of Ramna and the heart of Shahbagh and Shahid Minar young voices rose with a single, firm cry: "**We Want Justice.**" It was not a slogan. It was a verdict pronounced not in courtrooms, but in the public square.

It was this uprising of moral clarity that led to the fall of a regime that had weaponized the law and compromised the soul of justice. For the first time in our history, the judiciary was not spared scrutiny. The very foundations of judicial legitimacy were questioned by the people we are meant to serve.

It was from that fire that my appointment emerged, not as a ceremonial elevation, but as a solemn mandate. I was not chosen by accident, nor appointed for prestige. I was summoned, by the moral energy of a people who demanded that the judiciary be rebuilt with courage, truth, and accountability.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On 21 September 2024, I declared my **Reform Roadmap for Judiciary**, a blueprint born not in the silence of chambers but in the thunder of civic

resistance. This roadmap rests on three pillars-judicial independence, administrative autonomy, and procedural efficiency.

We have since taken bold steps. Two bodies, the **Judicial Appointment Council** and the **Supreme Judicial Council** have been operationalized with full authority to appoint and remove judges of the Supreme Court, insulated from executive interference. A draft law for the creation of a **Supreme Court Secretariat** has been submitted to the Government.

But institutional architecture is but only one part of reform. The deeper work is cultural, human, and moral. We must confront a tragic truth, the common person does not experience justice as something near, swift, or honest. They see delay, corruption, and alienation. To change this, I issued a **12-point directives** against corruption, establishing two grievance redress helplines at the Supreme Court, pushing for digital case tracking, and introducing transparency protocols that are now being replicated vigorously and with unprecedented enthusiasm and commitment at the district level all over the country.

I have personally visited every division of Bangladesh, Chattogram to Rajshahi, Sylhet to Rangpur, Mymensingh to Khulnato carry the message of reform. I have met with judges, magistrates, and lawyers and have called on the district judiciary and local bar associations to rise to the challenge, not as passive enforcers of tradition, but as architects of a new people-centric justice delivery system.

And they have responded emphatically, Ladies and Gentlemen. The **Judicial Service Association** has begun consultations. Local bar associations have initiated seminars. I am confident that it is in that spirit that this very association, the **Supreme Court Bar Association**, shall invariably assume its role not only as guardian of the Bar, but as a significant **stakeholder** in the

national reform project. The Bench cannot reform alone. The Bar must lead beside us.

সুধী,

আমরা এখন আমাদের প্রাতিষ্ঠানিক ইতিহাসের এক নব অধ্যায়ের দ্বারপ্রান্তে। আমি গত ৬ মাস ধরে বাংলাদেশের সর্বোচ্চ যে সংস্কারের বার্তা নিয়ে বেড়িয়েছি আমি সেই বার্তা আপনাদের কাছে আজকে উপস্থাপন করছি। সংস্কারের যে প্রক্রিয়া গত সেপ্টেম্বর হতে শুরু হয়েছিল তার ইধারাবাহিকতায় আমি আপনাদেরকে এই প্রক্রিয়ায় আপনাদের অংশীদারিত্বের কথা স্মরণ করিয়ে দিতে চাই। দেশের ৮টি বিভাগে আমি সকলকে এই সংস্কারের প্রক্রিয়ায় দায়িত্ব নেয়ার কথা বলেছি আজকে তারই পুনরাবৃত্তি করছি। In other words, I am asking you to take charge. শুধু আসন্ন মাস গুলোতে এই সংস্কারের গতিশীলতা বজায় রাখার জন্য ইনয়বরং সামনের বছর গুলোতে তার স্থায়িত্ব বজায় রাখার জন্য আপনাদের কাছে আমার আহ্বান রইল।

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Let me take this moment to share a development of national significance. On **22 June 2025**, the Supreme Court of Bangladesh shall, In Sha Allah, host a **plenary session on judicial reform**, graced by the presence of the Hon'ble Chief Adviser of the Interim Government. This will not be a mere event, it shall be a national milestone, a time for us to collectively renew our vows to constitutional justice, independence, and service to the people.

None of these reforms could have gained traction without the support of our trusted partners. The **UNDP**, with strong commitment has, stood by us since the December last year. Our international partners, preeminently the **European Union**, the **United Kingdom**, and Sweden, have lent considerable support not the least of which has been their participation at ambassadorial level at our judicial roadshows in Mymensingh, Khulna, Chottogram, Rangpur, and Rajshahi.

It is in this context that the conferral of the **Honorary Fellowship for life** by **Wadham College, University of Oxford**, gains a special meaning. It serves as a call to remain vigilant, bold, and humane. It is a recognition of Bangladesh's new judicial awakening. Wadham College, with its legacy of progressive thought and principled dissent, has long been associated with those who dared to speak against orthodoxy in the name of equity. Unsurprisingly therefore, there hangs prominently in Wadham's Senior Common Room a portrait of John Cook, a Wadham Alumnus who was the first Solicitor General of the English Commonwealth and initiated the prosecution of Charles I. Cook had built a reputation as a highly original and a progressive lawyer if not a radical one and played a pivotal role in bringing charges of high treason against Charles I. At that time the trying of a reigning King had no precedent. Previous monarchs had been deposed but none had been brought to trial. Of course, upon the restoration of Charles II, Cook was eventually convicted for regicide and was executed in 1660. But that has not stopped Wadham from celebrating and marvelling at his legacy since.

### **Distinguished Guests,**

I began this journey with a belief that justice is not a destination, it is a discipline. A discipline we must renew each day, with conscience, with sacrifice, and with humility. The revolution that restored dignity to this office is not over. It was a catalyst at renewal with renewed vigour. The future of our judiciary, and indeed our country will be defined not by words declared from this podium, but by how faithfully we serve the people who gave us this chance not only to reform and rebuild but also to consider all aspects of transitional and indeed restorative justice in the long run.

I thank the Supreme Court Bar Association for this gracious gesture. I thank my fellow judges, colleagues, and respected guests. And I thank Wadham College,

Oxford University for reminding us that the world is watching and sometimes, just sometimes, it applauds as well.

Thank you all.