

# **Justice (R) Syed Mansoor Ali Shah**

## **From the bench to the world: constitutionalism, arbitration, and public service.**

Justice (R) Syed Mansoor Ali Shah served as the Senior Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan and earlier as Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court. Over a judicial career spanning more than sixteen years, he emerged as one of Pakistan's most influential jurists, widely recognised for shaping constitutional law, human rights, gender equality, environmental and climate justice, child justice, commercial and arbitration jurisprudence, and the technological transformation of courts. His work reflects a deep commitment to judicial independence, institutional integrity, and a people-centred vision of justice.

Educated at the University of Cambridge, the University of the Punjab, and Aitchison College, Lahore, Justice Shah began his professional life as a corporate and constitutional litigator. Prior to his elevation to the Lahore High Court in 2009, he was a founding partner of Afzidi, Shah & Minallah, one of Pakistan's leading law firms at the time, with a thriving practice in corporate, constitutional, and commercial litigation. He voluntarily relinquished a flourishing legal practice upon joining the judiciary, marking the beginning of full-time public service on the bench.

In 2016, he assumed office as Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court, where he led some of the most consequential institutional reforms in the court's history. These included the establishment of Punjab's first court-annexed mediation centres, which launched Pakistan's judiciary-led ADR movement; the creation of Model Civil and Criminal Courts; the development of a province-wide enterprise IT system in collaboration with the Punjab Information Technology Board; and the restructuring of judicial education through far-reaching reforms at the Punjab Judicial Academy. He founded the Lahore High Court Research Centre, embedding a culture of research-informed adjudication and evidence-based institutional development. These reforms laid the groundwork for data-driven performance evaluation, judicial human-resource reform, and gender-inclusive court environments.

Elevated to the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2018, Justice Shah authored landmark judgments that strengthened constitutional protections for women, children, persons with disabilities, minorities, and voters; reinforced pro-arbitration and pro-mediation approaches to commercial dispute resolution; and significantly advanced Pakistan's jurisprudence on environmental governance and climate justice. He authored Pakistan's first Supreme Court judgment on Artificial Intelligence, emphasising ethical, transparent, and responsible use of technology to enhance judicial efficiency and public trust. His electoral jurisprudence affirmed political participation and the integrity of the vote as foundational constitutional entitlements. Across diverse areas of law, he consistently advocated the integration of scientific knowledge into judicial reasoning, particularly in environmental and criminal adjudication, believing that robust science strengthens evidentiary standards and judicial credibility.

Justice Shah's judicial philosophy reflects a climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable vision of justice that is gender-sensitive, child-centred, minority-inclusive, and equality-oriented. His commitment to reform extended beyond adjudication to legislation. As Chair of Pakistan's National Arbitration Law Committee from 2023 to 2024, he led the drafting of a modern Arbitration Bill aligned with the UNCITRAL Model Law, intended to replace the Arbitration Act of 1940 and position Pakistan as a competitive regional arbitration hub. His

work in this field is complemented by long-standing engagement with ADR education and international standards as an accredited mediator with CEDR, London.

In November 2025, Justice Shah resigned from the Supreme Court of Pakistan in fidelity to the Constitution and in defence of judicial independence. In his resignation letter, he observed that remaining within a court stripped of its constitutional jurisdiction would amount to “silent acquiescence in a constitutional wrong,” and that resignation was “the only honest and effective expression of honouring my oath.” His decision reflected a principled stand for constitutional supremacy at a moment of unprecedented institutional strain on the judiciary. Although in line to assume office as the 45th Chief Justice of Pakistan, he was excluded through the Twenty-Sixth Constitutional Amendment, which altered the seniority structure of the Supreme Court; the amendment’s constitutionality remains under judicial challenge.

Following his resignation, Justice Shah has pursued a three-pillared professional pathway: international arbitration and mediation; strategic legal consultancy on governance, regulation, and institutional reform; and legal education and academic engagement. He currently serves as Distinguished Professor of Practice at Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), will hold the position of Bok Visiting Professor at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School in 2027, and is engaged in teaching at Yale University. His academic work focuses on constitutionalism, climate justice, arbitration, judicial independence, and the future of courts.

Justice Shah continues to regard public service as a lifelong responsibility. Beyond formal roles, he remains actively engaged in public-spirited service, including voluntary mediation initiatives, access-to-justice efforts, and institutional capacity-building. He is particularly committed to supporting educational and civic institutions, including his alma mater, Aitchison College, reflecting his belief that service to society does not end with office.

Internationally, Justice Shah is an Honorary Bencher of Lincoln’s Inn, a Judicial Member of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment (Brazil), and a member of Yale University’s Global Constitutionalism Program. He served on Pakistan’s Rhodes Scholarship Committee from 2019 to 2024 and has been associated with SIFFoC (UK) in advancing specialised commercial courts. A widely travelled speaker, he has lectured and participated in judicial dialogues at Harvard University, Yale University, New York University (New York and Abu Dhabi), the University of Chicago, Humboldt University of Berlin, and IE University in Spain. He represented Pakistan at COP-28 in Dubai and COP-29 in Baku, highlighting Pakistan’s progressive climate-justice jurisprudence. In 2016, he was invited by Pope Francis to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at the Vatican for a high-level dialogue on climate change and moral responsibility.

Justice Shah has authored influential judgments, reports, and scholarly writings on constitutional law, climate justice, ADR, judicial independence, electoral rights, and court modernisation. His work—including *The Rude Awakening* (2010) and the report of the Judicial Flood Inquiry Tribunal—continues to shape legal discourse in Pakistan and internationally. His judicial legacy reflects a sustained devotion to constitutional morality, human dignity, and institutional integrity.

Outside professional life, Justice Shah is an avid golfer, tennis and padel player, cyclist, and reader, with a strong interest in travel and music. His life’s work embodies a principled commitment to strengthening institutions, expanding fundamental rights, fostering innovation, and upholding the Constitution with clarity, courage, and conscience.

