

#WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

# AZRA MAHMOOD

## the powerhouse behind Bangladesh's fashion revolution

Azra Mahmood needs no introduction — she is a trailblazer in the Bangladeshi fashion industry, effortlessly balancing the roles of model, choreographer, mentor, and show director. With a career spanning over two decades, she has not only ruled the runway, but also contributed to reshaping the industry from behind the scenes. As the founder of Azra Mahmood Talent Camp (AMTC), she has nurtured a new generation of models, equipping them with the skills to shine on both national and international platforms.



Star Lifestyle caught up with her recently to discuss her journey, the evolution of Bangladesh's fashion scene, and what it truly takes to make it in this ever-changing industry.

**You've worn many hats — model, choreographer, MC, mentor. Which role feels the most “you?”**

I've had many roles — model, presenter, choreographer, stylist, mentor, entrepreneur, and show director, even dabbling in acting. But rather than choosing one, I'd say fashion itself defines me. Whether on the runway or behind the scenes, my passion remains constant. It's not about the role — it's about the world of fashion that continues to pull me in.

**Through your talent camp, you've mentored many aspiring models. What is the one quality you believe every successful model must have?**

The modelling industry today is far more competitive than it used to be. With new agencies and training schools, at least 100 new models enter the field every month. In such an environment, the only way to sustain and stand out is to keep growing and evolving.

A model who doesn't improve, adapt, or refine their craft will eventually fade away. Continuous learning is essential. If a model doesn't work on their skills — be it their walk, expressions, adaptability, or professionalism — they won't last long. So, a successful model is someone who sees the bigger picture, keeps evolving, and is always willing to learn.

**How has the Bangladeshi fashion scene evolved since you first started, and what's still missing?**

I started my career in 2001, when Bangladesh's fashion industry was much smaller, with limited designers, models, and events — mostly concentrated in November and December.

Now, 24 years later, the industry has expanded significantly, with more retail brands, designers, associations, and fashion weeks, creating greater opportunities. However, proper management remains a challenge. Without a system integrating economics, design, branding, and talent development, sustainable growth is difficult.

Additionally, Bangladesh has long been recognised as a manufacturing hub rather than a fashion hub. We focused on “Made in Bangladesh” instead of “Designed in Bangladesh,” limiting global recognition. While this is slowly changing, there is still a long way to go.



**Fashion is often about beauty standards. Have you ever struggled with them, and how do you help others navigate this?**

Inclusivity in fashion often feels like a token effort — one plus-size or unconventional model doesn't mean true diversity. When I started, fair skin was preferred by many clients, which is absurd, given our country's demographics. Unfortunately, this bias still exists.

Beauty is a political construct, shaped by those in power. Historically, different cultures have defined beauty based on their influence — today, Eurocentric features dominate due to Western control.

As a mentor and industry professional, I challenge these norms by casting models based on talent, presence, and confidence — not just their skin tone or body type. I also ensure that models understand their value goes beyond societal beauty standards. The industry is slowly changing, but we need more decision-makers to push for true inclusivity.

**What inspires you to keep pushing boundaries in your work?**

From the very beginning, my goal has been to bring world-class fashion productions to Bangladesh. I remember watching FashionTV (FTV) and being mesmerised by the grandeur of international fashion. I knew that with my height, I might not get

to that level as a model, but I could create shows that matched that standard.

That dream has driven me for years. I've worked on creating bigger, better productions, making fashion shows more visually compelling, and pushing for professional execution. I believe Bangladesh has the talent, but we need the right platforms to showcase it.

I'm not there yet, but I'm close. And as long as there's room for growth, I'll keep pushing. Because the moment things feel stagnant, I lose motivation. Growth is what fuels me.

**What's your advice for young aspiring fashion professionals?**

Today's generation wants instant results. They want to achieve success overnight, but true success takes time. If something comes too easily, you don't truly appreciate it, and it doesn't last.

The key is to invest in the process, work hard, and stay patient. If you put in the effort, learn the craft, and build your skills over time, your success will be meaningful and sustainable. Also, tolerance is crucial. This industry can be tough. There will be criticism, rejections, and setbacks. But if you stay focused, resilient, and keep moving forward, you will eventually make it.

**In the next 10 years, how do you see Bangladesh's fashion industry evolving?**

The biggest challenge right now is that many people still don't take fashion seriously. It's seen as something superficial, when in reality, fashion is a major part of daily life. The first thing you do when you leave your house is put on clothes — that's fashion! It's an essential industry, yet it still doesn't get the level of importance or support that it deserves.

For real growth, we need proper backing, investment, and industry-wide coordination. Right now, individuals are trying on their own, but we need a collective push.

Despite these challenges, I do believe the industry will

continue growing. More designers, brands, and platforms are emerging, and as long as people keep innovating and pushing boundaries, Bangladesh will eventually establish itself as a recognised fashion hub.

**By Ayman Anika**  
**Photo: Courtesy**

