

From Banarasi to Bandhani: EU President's Fashion Diplomacy Rocks Delhi

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European Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen** has drawn widespread praise not just for her role in strengthening India–EU ties, but also for her culturally respectful fashion choices during her official visit to India. Her sartorial selections blended Indian textile traditions with contemporary elegance, earning acclaim from fashion experts and cultural commentators alike.

A Stylish Start at Republic Day

Von der Leyen's fashion diplomacy began during the **77th Republic Day celebrations** in New Delhi, where she wore a striking **maroon-and-gold Banarasi brocade bandhgala jacket** designed by **Rajesh Pratap Singh**—a thoughtful homage to the famed handloom craft of Varanasi. This ensemble celebrated India's rich weaving heritage while maintaining her signature dignified style.

Blending Tradition with Modern Diplomacy

In subsequent events, she continued her sartorial tribute to Indian craftsmanship. At the **16th India–EU Summit**, held amid the signing of the landmark India–EU free trade agreement, von der Leyen wore an **electric blue bandhgala by Indian designer Anamika Khanna**, pairing rich embroidery with refined tailoring—a look that balanced traditional artistry with contemporary appeal.

Regional Textiles Take Center Stage

Her wardrobe also showcased regional Indian textiles beyond Banarasi brocade. At a Rashtrapati Bhavan banquet, she was seen in a **yellow kurta jacket with a Bandhani stole**, highlighting the celebrated tie-and-dye craft associated with Rajasthan and Gujarat. Meanwhile, a shared moment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi featured both leaders in **Eri silk stoles**—a textile from India's Northeast known for its “Ahimsa” (cruelty-free) production process and ethical significance.

Why Her Style Resonated

Critics and fashion commentators have lauded von der Leyen's choices as meaningful **fashion diplomacy**. Rather than opting for Western formal wear or superficial cultural elements, her attire demonstrated **respect for Indian heritage** and thoughtfully incorporated traditional textiles into high-profile diplomatic settings. This approach struck a balance between celebrating craftsmanship and maintaining diplomatic decorum, a feat not always achieved by visiting dignitaries in the past.

Fashion as Cultural Dialogue

Analysts say von der Leyen’s sartorial choices reflect a deeper engagement with cultural exchange—using fashion as a **silent yet powerful form of diplomacy**. By embracing handloom and artisanal textiles like Banarasi brocade, Bandhani, and Eri silk, she placed India’s rich textile legacy on a global stage while reinforcing the symbolism of partnership between India and the European Union.

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