



#WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

FROM THE STREETS OF DHAKA TO SYDNEY: Priota Iftekhar carries her roots with pride

It's fashion as storytelling, and the storyteller is Priota Iftekhar. Once known as the "Flag Girl" for proudly waving our red-and-green flag across borders, she is now catching attention with her refreshingly bold, cultural attires in Sydney, Australia.

Priota Iftekhar first rose to fame by fearlessly travelling solo with the Bangladeshi flag in her hands. It was a powerful act that broke stereotypes and sparked a movement rooted in identity, freedom, and national pride. She is also the founder of an online community, The Flag Girl.

"When I travel abroad, people often don't realise I'm Bangladeshi," says Iftekhar with a smile. "Many have never even heard of Bangladesh and assume I'm from India. And that's exactly why I decided to come up with things that somehow represent who I am and where I come from."

Priota Iftekhar started The Flag Girl project in 2009 and it allows people to stay connected around the world. People from more than 50 countries are members of this network, mostly young people. Her global influence was later acknowledged in 2018 when she won the title of Miss Culture Worldwide. And now, she is continuing her path as the director of Bangladesh Tourism Beauty, an organisation that is empowering women and showcasing Bangladeshi culture to the world.

Now based in Australia, Iftekhar's expression of cultural identity has taken on a new form, particularly through fashion. Her most recent photoshoot, full of bold colours, familiar symbols, and street-style nostalgia is a magnificent homage to Bangladesh.

In one unforgettable look, Iftekhar wears a tailored blazer made from gamcha — a humble, chequered cotton fabric used across Bangladesh. The piece of textile

was actually sourced from Dhaka's New Market and transformed into a high-fashion statement.

The accessories told just as much of a story: earrings shaped like tiny jhalmuri cones (the streetside, spicy, Bangladeshi puffed rice snack), fuchka-inspired earrings, and even a handbag styled to look like a double-decker BRTC bus.

All these quirky, joyful pieces were crafted by the creative minds at "Sketch & Handmade Craft — Art Gallery".

The shoot also featured international model Valeria Busch, who wore a striking dress designed by Media Ahmed Dipa, with the bold message "*Banglar mayera meyera shokolei muktijodhdha*" meaning, Bengali mothers and daughters are all freedom fighters. She also carried a matching box bag designed by Sharollo, with the same fierce sentiment. Outfits designed by Shagufta Shahid Etrat under Mezro Agency were showcased in the photoshoot, which was not just about fashion but a celebration of identity, memory, and pride.

As a certified personal stylist and model, Iftekhar has found her own way to make a statement. Whether she's walking the

runway or styling a look, she carries her roots with pride.

"In everything I wear and do, I try to showcase my culture," she explains.

Currently, she is preparing for the upcoming Australian Fashion Week and her goal is clear. She's planning to wear a saree that captures the essence of Bangladesh, something unmistakably hers and undeniably homegrown.

"People here genuinely appreciate our culture," she says. "And I never want to miss a single opportunity to represent it with pride."

This purpose is not just a word in Priota Iftekhar's life; it's a part of her upbringing. Growing up, she was surrounded by stories of boldness and vision. Her grandmother, Nurjahan Begum, did not just write history, she made it as the trailblazing editor of Begum

magazine, a powerful voice for women at a time when few dared to speak up.

Her grandfather, a journalist at The Daily Ittefaq, believed deeply in nurturing young minds through the "*Kochi Kachar Mela*". With his camera, he captured the soul of a nation during the Liberation War and carried those images to the world — telling Bangladesh's story when it mattered the

most.

That legacy of courage and creativity shaped Iftekhar as a person. She became the first in her family to earn not just one, but two master's degrees — one from the prestigious University of Technology Sydney. However, degrees were only the beginning. She now brings her passion to life as the PR and Communications Manager at JICS Australia, where she leads multicultural initiatives that celebrate diversity, inclusion, and identity.

What sets Priota apart is not just her résumé — it's her presence. Whether she's speaking on a panel, walking the runway, or simply strolling through Sydney, there's something magnetic about her. She carries her heritage not as a burden, but as a badge of honour.

Imagine walking down a street in Sydney and seeing a girl carrying a handbag that resembles a packet of crackers — the same one you used to munch on during school breaks. And then you notice her earrings: tiny plates of fuchka, so perfectly detailed that it seems like they came straight from a street stall in Dhaka. For a moment, you might feel that you're not in Sydney anymore. You're back home! And just when you think it can't get more nostalgic, you realise she's wearing a bold blazer, which is made from the same cotton that's used to make a traditional Bangladeshi gamcha.

Sounds surreal? Perhaps, but it's real and Priota Iftekhar is making it happen.

By Jannatul Bushra
Photo: Courtesy

