

Bezos' wedding causes stir in Venice

By **DAVID BILLER and PAOLO SANTALUCIA**
The Associated Press

VENICE, Italy — The sky itself is no limit for billionaire Jeff Bezos and fiancée Lauren Sánchez, who have traveled into space — and expectations are just about as high for their wedding in Venice.

One of the world's most enchanting cities as backdrop? Check.

Star-studded guestlist and tabloid buzz? Of course.

Local flavor? You bet.

Beyond that, the team of the world's fourth-richest man has kept details under wraps. Still, whispers point to events spread across the Italian lagoon city, adding complexity to what would have been a massive logistical undertaking even on dry land.

On Thursday, dozens of private jets touched down at Venice's airport as yachts pulled into the city's famed waterways. Aboard were athletes, celebrities, influencers and business leaders, converging to revel in extravagance that is as much a testament to the couple's love as to their extraordinary wealth.

The heady hoopla recalled the 2014 wedding in Venice of actor George Clooney to human rights lawyer Amal Alamuddin, when adoring crowds lined the canals and hundreds of well-wishers gathered outside City Hall.

Not so for these nuptials, which have become a lightning rod for protests.

Still, any desire to dampen the prevailing fever pitch has yet to materialize. Instead, the glitterati were set to party, and the paparazzi jostling for glimpses of the gilded gala.

Whatever happens, it will be a wedding for the ages.

LOGISTICS AND COSTS

Venice is famed for its network of canals, where gondoliers croon for lovestruck couples and even ambulances are aquatic. But water transport of everything from bouquets to guests makes Venice among the world's most challenging cities for a party, according to Jack Ezon, CEO of luxury travel advisory and event planner Embark Beyond.

"It's a very tight-knit community; everyone there knows everyone, and you need to work with the right people," said Ezon, whose company has put on a dozen high-end events in Venice. "There's very tight control, especially on movement there with boats."

It at least triples the cost versus staging the same soiree in Rome or Florence, he said.

Veneto Gov. Luca Zaia was first to give an estimated tally for the Bezos/Sánchez bash: He told reporters this week the most recent total he saw was between 40 million and 48 million euros (up to \$56 million).

It's an eye-popping, jaw-dropping figure that's over 1,000 times the \$36,000 average cost of American couples' weddings in 2025, according to wedding planning website Zola's annual report.

Bezos' team has been tight-lipped about where these millions are going. When the youngest son of Asia's richest man married last July, performances by pop stars Rihanna and Justin Bieber pushed up the price tag.

"How do you spend \$40 million on a three- or four-day event?" Ezon said. "You could bring headliners, A-list performers, great DJs from anywhere in the world. You could spend \$2 million on an incredible glass tent that's



Jeff Bezos (left) and Lauren Sanchez kiss as they leave a hotel for their pre-wedding reception in Venice, Italy on Thursday.

LUCA BRUNO / AP

only there for 10 hours, but it takes a month to build," or expand the celebration to local landmarks.

There's no sign Sánchez and Bezos, the former CEO of Amazon, intend to take over any of Venice's tourist-thronged hotspots. Still, intense hand-wringing about the prospect prompted their wedding coordinator, Lanza & Baucina, to issue a rare statement calling those rumors false.

On Thursday, a string of water taxis cut through the lagoon to bring Bezos, Sánchez and guests to the Madonna dell'Orto cloister as some onlookers cheered. Paparazzi followed in their own boats, trying to capture guests on camera — Oprah Winfrey, Kim Kardashian, Ivanka Trump, Tom Brady, Orlando Bloom — as police on jet skis patrolled.

Local media have reported the couple will hold a ceremony Friday on San Giorgio island, across the lagoon basin from St. Mark's Square. Associated

Press journalists circling the island Thursday saw workers assembling tents and private security personnel stationed at every landing point, including a newly installed dock.

Media have also reported a reception Saturday in the Arsenale, a former navy base best known as a primary venue for the Venice Biennale.

'NO SPACE'

There are some who say these two should not be wed in this city.

They characterize the wedding as a decadent display of wealth in a world with growing inequality, and argue it's a shining example of tourism taking precedence over residents' needs, particularly affordable housing and essential services. Venice is also one of the cities most vulnerable to rising sea levels from climate change.

"Venice is not just a pretty picture, a pretty postcard to please the needs and wants

of the elite or of mass tourists, but it is an alive city, made of people who want to actually live there," Stella Faye, a university researcher from Venice, said on Friday.

About a dozen Venetian organizations — including housing advocates, anti-cruise ship campaigners and university groups — are protesting under the banner "No Space for Bezos," a play on words referring to his space exploration company Blue Origin and the bride's recent space flight.

Greenpeace unfurled a banner in St. Mark's Square denouncing Bezos for paying insufficient taxes. Activists floated a bald-headed Bezos-inspired mannequin down Venice's Grand Canal atop an Amazon delivery box, its hands clenching fake cash.

Authorities — from Venice's mayor to the nation's tourism minister — have dismissed the outcry, saying it ignores the visibility and economic boost the wedding brings.

"There will be photos everywhere, social media will go wild over the bride's dress, over the ceremony," Italy's tourism minister, Daniela Santanchè, told the AP.

"All of this translates into a massive free publicity campaign. In fact, because they will spend a lot of money, they will enrich Venice — our shopkeepers, artisans, restaurateurs, hotels. So it's a great opportunity both for spending and for promoting Italy in the world."

PHILANTHROPY

As Amazon's CEO, Bezos usually avoided the limelight, frequently delegating announcements and business updates to his executives. Today he has a net worth of \$231 billion, according to Forbes.

In 2019, he announced he was divorcing his first wife, MacKenzie Scott, just before the National Enquirer published a story about an affair with Sánchez, a former TV news anchor. Sánchez filed for divorce the day after Bezos' divorce was finalized.

He stepped down as CEO in 2021, saying he wished to spend more time on side projects, including Blue Origin, The Washington Post, which he owns, and his philanthropic initiatives.

Sitting beside Sánchez during an interview with CNN in 2022, he announced plans to give away the majority of his wealth during his lifetime.

Last week, a Venetian environmental research association issued a statement saying Bezos' Earth Fund was supporting its work with an "important donation."

CORILA, which seeks protection of the Venetian lagoon system, said contact began in April, well before any protests.

Trump: U.S. signs trade deal with China

By **ELAINE KURTENBACH**
AP Business Writer

BANGKOK — The U.S. and China have signed an agreement on trade, President Donald Trump said, adding he expects to soon have a deal with India.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told Bloomberg TV that the deal was signed earlier this week. Neither Lutnick nor Trump provided any details about the agreement.

"We just signed with China the other day," Trump said late Thursday.

Lutnick said the deal was "signed and sealed" two days earlier.

It was unclear if the latest agreement was different from the one Trump announced two weeks earlier that he said would make it easier for American industries to obtain much-needed magnets and rare earth minerals. That pact cleared the way for the trade talks to continue, while the U.S. agreed to stop trying to revoke visas of Chinese nationals on U.S. college campuses.

China's Commerce Ministry said Friday that the two sides had "further confirmed the details of the framework." But its statement did not explicitly mention U.S. access to rare earths, minerals used in high-tech applications that have been at the center of the negotiations.

"China will approve the export applications of controlled items that meet the conditions in accordance with the law. The United States will cancel a series of restrictive measures taken against China accordingly. It is hoped that the United States and China will meet each other halfway," it said.

The agreement follows initial talks in Geneva in early May that led both sides to postpone massive tariff hikes that were threat-

ening to freeze much trade between the two countries. Later talks in London set a framework for negotiations and the deal mentioned by Trump appeared to formalize that agreement.

"The president likes to close these deals himself. He's the dealmaker. We're going to have deal after deal," Lutnick said.

China has not announced any new agreements, but it announced earlier this week that it was speeding up approvals of exports of rare earths, materials used in high-tech products such as electric vehicles. Beijing's limits on exports of rare earths have been a key point of contention.

The Chinese Commerce Ministry said Thursday that Beijing was accelerating review of export license applications for rare earths and had approved "a certain number of compliant appli-

cations."

Export controls of the minerals apparently eclipsed tariffs in the latest round of trade negotiations between Beijing and Washington after China imposed permitting requirements on seven rare earth elements in April, threatening to disrupt production of cars, robots, wind turbines and other high-tech products in the U.S. and around the world.

China also has taken steps recently on the fentanyl issue, announcing last week that it would designate two more substances as precursor chemicals for fentanyl, making them subject to production, transport and export regulations. Trump has demanded that Beijing do more to stop the flow of such precursor ingredients to Mexican drug cartels, which use them to make fentanyl for sale in the U.S. He imposed 20% tariffs on

Chinese imports over the fentanyl issue, the biggest part of current 30% across-the-board taxes on Chinese goods.

The agreement struck in May in Geneva called for both sides to scale back punitive tariff hikes imposed as Trump escalated his trade war and sharply raised import duties. Some higher tariffs, such as those imposed by Washington related to the trade in fentanyl and duties on aluminum and steel, remain in place.

The rapidly shifting policies are taking a toll on both of the world's two largest economies.

The U.S. economy contracted at a 0.5% annual pace from January through March, partly because imports surged as companies and households rushed to buy foreign goods before Trump could impose tariffs on them.



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