

O HERALDO

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Local residents prove Venice isn't a billionaire's playground

When Jeff Bezos and Lauren Sánchez chose Venice as the setting for their ultra-exclusive, celebrity-spangled wedding, it wasn't just an opulent celebration — it became a flashpoint in a growing global debate about wealth, privilege, and the commodification of public space. The billionaire's nuptials, which took over the city for three days, with over 200 high-profile guests and a parade of yachts, private jets, and luxury motorboats, were met with something Bezos is less accustomed to: resistance.

From inflatable crocodile threats to banners reading "No Space for Bezos", the protests were about what the wedding symbolised. In a fragile, overcrowded city where the population has dwindled and locals are being priced out, the image of one of the world's richest men "renting" the city for a private party felt like the last straw for many Venetians.

The anger is rooted in more than optics. Venice, a UNESCO World Heritage site, has long been a poster child for overtourism. The city, once home to over 150,000 residents, now has fewer than 50,000 in its historic centre. Short-term rentals have replaced permanent housing. Cruise ships, mass tourism, and now billionaire weddings threaten the very soul of the lagoon city.

Protesters aren't naive. They know Venice thrives on tourism. But the kind of tourism that sees 95 private jets landing in a city already gasping under climate pressure is not sustainable.

The protests were not just about Venice either. They tapped into a wider unease about billionaires and their place in society. The "No Space for Bezos" campaign dovetails with a global wave of frustration toward the ultra-rich: from Elon Musk's excesses to Taylor Swift's carbon-heavy travel habits

Nor is it equitable. While Bezos and Sánchez dined beneath centuries-old ceilings and their guests posed on gondolas, hundreds of Venetians marched through the narrow streets chanting, "Kisses yes, Bezos no". They weren't just protesting disruption — they were rejecting a system that increasingly treats public spaces as the playground of the elite.

Some local politicians dismissed the protests as "social envy" and claimed

that the events brought "prestige" to the city. That's a tired and convenient narrative. It's the same logic that justifies allowing megayachts to dock in Venice's delicate lagoon or letting foreign investors turn ancient apartments into tourist hotels. Prestige doesn't clean the canals. Prestige doesn't lower rents. Prestige doesn't keep Venetians living in Venice.

And while Bezos's defenders point to the €3 million he donated to Venetian environmental causes, the gesture rings hollow in the face of the massive ecological footprint left by his wedding. The irony of staging a wedding in a city sinking from climate change while flying in nearly 100 private planes is not lost on anyone. Nor is the hypocrisy of asking ordinary people to "do their part" with paper straws and recycling while billionaires jet from island to island without consequence.

The protests were not just about Venice either. They tapped into a wider unease about billionaires and their place in society. The "No Space for Bezos" campaign dovetails with a global wave of frustration toward the ultra-rich: from Elon Musk's excesses to Taylor Swift's carbon-heavy travel habits. Protesters in Venice didn't just chant against Bezos — they called out inequality, climate inaction, and the privatisation of shared heritage.

What is especially galling is how normalized these spectacles have become. When celebrities and billionaires treat ancient cities as backdrops for personal milestones, and public officials cheer them on in the name of economic benefit, we risk losing sight of who cities are really for. Venice should not become a mere film set, an Instagram filter, or a billionaire's ballroom.

In many ways, Bezos's wedding became a mirror, reflecting back a world increasingly divided between those who can rent cities and those who are evicted from them. The fact that activists successfully forced the couple to relocate their party venue — from the Scuola Grande della Misericordia to the more secluded Arsenale — demonstrates the power of civic resistance. It also sends a message: no matter how rich you are, you don't own everything.

Of course, not everyone agrees. Some local businesses benefited from the influx of VIPs. Caterers, designers, hoteliers — many of whom are local — welcomed the boost. And there is an argument to be made for "high-quality" tourism over mass tourism. But the choice shouldn't be between the cruise ship crowd and billionaire weddings. The real challenge lies in reimagining tourism in a way that respects cities, their ecosystems, and the people who live there.

More than a big fat wedding, what happened in Venice this weekend was a moment of public reckoning. It was a reminder that beauty, history, and community cannot be bought. Or, at least, they shouldn't be.

Venice may be sinking under the weight of rising seas and rising inequality, but its people are refusing to go under quietly. That should give all of us hope. And perhaps a warning.

comment



SIDDHARTH DESAI

Countries like NASA and China are now considering the moon as the next platform for astronauts, shifting focus from the ISS. The timing of India's entry into the human spaceflight arena is opportune



When Rakesh Sharma went to space four decades ago, India did not have a human spaceflight program. In contrast, today, India has a robust program that will provide valuable feedback for Gaganyaan's design processes. Globally, the landscape of human spaceflight is evolving; costs have decreased significantly, making space travel more accessible.

Countries like NASA and China are now considering the moon as the next platform for astronauts, shifting focus from the ISS. The timing of India's entry into the human spaceflight

India's historic return to human spaceflight: Axiom 4

In a historic leap, India has returned to human spaceflight after 40 years. The Axiom 4 mission successfully launched on June 25 from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, carrying Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla to the International Space Station (ISS). This achievement makes Shukla only the second Indian in space, following Rakesh Sharma's mission in 1984. The mission, utilising a SpaceX Crew Dragon atop a Falcon 9 rocket, also includes astronauts from Poland and Hungary, marking a significant milestone for all three nations.

For India, Axiom 4 is more than just a mission; it signifies the country's growing stature among space-faring nations. As ISRO prepares for its own Gaganyaan human spaceflight, along with plans for a future Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS) and a manned lunar mission by 2040, Axiom 4 serves as a critical stepping stone. As a mission pilot, Shukla will gather insights that will directly inform India's future endeavours. Led by veteran NASA astronaut Peggy Whitson, the four-member crew will spend 14 days aboard the ISS conducting nearly 60 scientific experiments.

This year marks the golden jubilee of Aryabhata, India's first satellite launched in 1975. From that point, India has evolved from relying on foreign launch vehicles to developing its own. The ambition to create a Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), akin to the ISS, exemplifies this leap in capability and development. Collaboration is crucial in the expensive realm of space business; for instance, the ISS itself is a five-country collaboration. If the Axiom 4 mission succeeds, it will not only enhance technological advancement but also provide insights into sustaining a habitat in space.

Evidence from Chandrayaan-2 and Chandrayaan-3 indicates that there is sufficient water ice on the moon, which is essential for long-duration missions. This mission will help determine if food can be grown in space, with plans for experiments focused on sprout beans and fenugreek (methi). This self-reliance is vital for future lunar missions, where water and food resources must be managed effectively.

Shubhanshu Shukla's participation will yield valuable data over the 14 days, contributing to both ISRO's development and the broader scientific community. His interactions with students on Earth will inspire future astronauts and engineers. International partnerships are essential; while Axiom serves as a conduit for accessing the ISS, true collaboration involves shared capabilities and instruments for moon missions.

The mission will also explore the effects of weightlessness on the human body, examining muscle and bone loss, which

are critical considerations for long-duration space travel, such as a potential three-year journey to Mars. Shukla's contributions will focus on human-machine interaction, gleaned insights applicable to Gaganyaan. Experiments will investigate growing high-protein crops in space and manufacturing materials in microgravity, which could lead to breakthroughs in medicine and other fields.

India's establishment of an analog space station in Ladakh, simulating conditions relevant to long-duration missions, further prepares the nation for its ambitious journey into space. This facility will enable research and testing of technologies needed for sustainable living in extraterrestrial environments. While engineering hardware development remains a crucial aspect of the human spaceflight system, Shukla's experiences will enhance overall capabilities, contributing to the long-term vision of India's space exploration goals.

India's entry into the select group of nations with human spaceflight capability is a significant milestone. As we celebrate past achievements, such as the Space Capsule Recovery Experiments (SRE-1) from nearly 20 years ago, we look forward to a series of planned missions, including Gaganyaan. With confidence in our navigation, communication, and remote sensing satellites, we are well-prepared for the next steps.

Axiom 4 is a landmark mission for India, representing not just participation in international space collaboration but also positioning India as a determined and capable space-faring nation. The next few days are crucial, and the data collected will provide invaluable insights for future generations. As India embarks on this journey, the hope is that it will inspire a new generation of scientists and engineers, fostering innovation and collaboration across borders. The success of this mission could also lead to increased investment in space research, further solidifying India's role in the global space arena.

(The author is an advocate by profession.)

Varsha Usgaonkar gives tiatr a shot in the arm

Mariano Fernandes' latest tiatr 'Devachem Naum Jietam Hanv' had some pleasant surprises - the biggest being Bollywood's Goan star Varsha Usgaonkar.

Varsha's praiseworthy histrionics brought back memories of the legendary Shalini Mardolkar!

Varsha literally carried the tiatr's storyline on her shoulders, ably supported by stellar performances from Prajakta, Dhruv, Maggie, Prince Jacob and septuagenarian Platilda.

She acted, sang and danced her heart out to the wholesome applause from the appreciative audience.

Another pleasant surprise was Jacob. For the first, the Prince of comedy did a full-length serious role and was paired with Varsha as her husband.

Kudos to Mariano for managing to put together a talented line-up of 16 actors and eight musicians. The band's five-member brass section was brilliantly orchestrated by maestro Joaquim D'Souza.

Mariano has indeed once again enriched the tiatr stage!

Paul Almeida, Sinquerim

Monsoon unmask's Goa's roads

Every year, the monsoon exposes the grim reality of Goa's road infrastructure. The roads begin to crumble under the first few showers, revealing the rampant use of substandard materials in construction and the complete disregard for engineering standards.

Tenders are allegedly awarded to handpicked contractors, with glaring loopholes in the process

ensuring that the full tender value is never actually utilised for the intended work. The result? Roads that begin to disintegrate even before the monsoon sets in properly. Potholes are no longer just minor depressions — they resemble large craters, mimicking geographical formations on a world map. When these fill with rainwater, the few remaining patches of intact road resemble islands amidst a sea of neglect.

In some areas, the situation is reminiscent of the rustic, unmetalled roads from Malgudi Days. Sadly, this has become routine. The PWD continues to award repair and maintenance works, including for government quarters, to the same preferred contractors without verifying the quality of output.

Shocking, no one is held accountable for substandard work. Engineers and contractors responsible for such conditions must be penalised. In fact, if they are found grossly incompetent, their engineering degrees should be reviewed, and they must be sent back to learn the fundamentals of road construction.

To see real change, the government must adopt a participatory approach to infrastructure planning and strictly enforce non-negotiable standards. It is essential to engage qualified transport planners, urban designers, and certified engineers who understand road design and safety standards. Most importantly, the credentials and technical expertise of existing road engineering staff must be thoroughly scrutinised.

letterstotheeditor

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All letters must contain correct postal address and telephone number. Letters are liable to be edited for brevity.

How can we expect quality when those supervising the work may not be qualified in the first place?

K G Vilop, Chorao

Protecting Adani is paramount

In a recent letter, the Securities and Exchange Commission of USA submitted its third status report to the US Department of Justice regarding l'affaire Adani, following earlier updates in February and April. The agency noted that it had sought the assistance of India's Ministry of Law and Justice under Article 5(a) of the Hague convention to serve the summons and complaint on the Adanis in India. It also said it had sent notices of the lawsuit and waiver requests directly to the Adani counsels.

However, there has been no confirmation yet that the Indian authorities have delivered the documents. Since the April Status Update, the SEC has corresponded extensively with the Indian government authorities for serving the summons on the defendants, but no results are forthcoming.

This inaction on the Indian government's part has gone beyond pandering to crony capitalists, it has breached extant international laws regarding financial crimes. As per settled law, the Centre is also an accessory after the fact and liable for legal action by US authorities. It is sickening to see how the government is brazening it out to protect its biggest funder in contravention

of judicial tenets.

Vinay Dwivedi, Benaulim

AI, a barrier to originality

Although extremely good use can be made to positive effect, Artificial Intelligence is gaining a massive foothold, what with its ability to compute by merging of similar contents on various topics in multiple ways which is making AI take a stranglehold over other data sites like Google and Wikipedia. This writer has been witness to one of Goa's publisher who has composed 7 songs with the aid of AI which are superb. However, computer aided and programming of to various extents of news contents and topics violate the originality of the individual writers, which is becoming popular, but which is curbing originality and impeding the ability of the brain to write, sing and create works of art first hand content.

Much of the AI-aided compositions is a blend of one or many original contents that have been programmed by the AI system. Although the AI norm may be acceptable, still credit should be given to the individual contributors on whose basis the AI system merges and creates a blend of contents.

There is nothing better than usage of the creative mind through storing and using content without AI influence. In fact constant use of artificially generated content will prove to be detrimental to originality by causing to usage of unoriginal content that are not

people'sedit

ANYONE CAN BE CREATIVE

IBONIO D' SOUZA

Every human being is born with the ability to be creative, but to use this faculty it calls for a lot of hard work on his or her part. Creativity is work that goes somewhere, it is a sustained effort towards an ideal.

It may not be given to one to build a dam like Visweswarayya or write verses like Rabindranath Tagore or make a scientific contribution like Ramanujam, but if he would live his life deeply and creatively, he must work and go on working to show his own view of what it means to be alive. The work itself may be modest, but if it calls forth delight, curiosity, inventiveness, he is using the same forces that a genius uses. Creativity is not so much an aptitude as an attitude, and therefore applicable anywhere from making a bowl of soup to building a rocket that can land on the moon. Those people we call talented know this by instinct. The rest of us have to learn it.

Perhaps, most often creativity begins in response to things greater than us. It has to be triggered and stirred into acting by a sight or by a word that we hear or read or sense by touch. Beyond such stirring comes reflection, an awareness taking note of our own thoughts. On the heels of awareness is the impulse to do something with what we feel and know. This is the stage where most of us begin to falter and stall. Making and doing turn to be so difficult that we abandon the attempt.

Just because an idea or plan does not take shape, we conclude that it is no good, that we are not creative any way, when, in fact, it takes an enlightened stubbornness to produce anything. Some people insist that they have no ideas at all, when what they mean is that they do not have big or original ideas. But good ideas stream through our consciousness every day when we meet people, travel, read and observe others in action. We can have more ideas by being hospitable to those we have; using them, trying them out, and not discarding them before we have given them a chance.

Some people sprout ideas like mushrooms but let the vision drift away because they are impatient with small beginnings. If they cannot start impressively, they choose not to start at all. This is deadly to creativity. Beyond the longing to do or make something to give our feeling form and substance comes the rough work of discipline. It is more truly in the small, daily moment-by-moment discipline that creativity can be seen than in the crowning triumph.

For creativity to emerge and blossom forth it means choosing from the multitude of possibilities a certain goal and then working patiently toward it, even when we are tired, puzzled or afraid. It means loving what we do, not just it's high points but it's day-in-day-out effort. It means sticking to one's purpose through a thousand storms and fires, from within as well as from without and experimenting, failing, trying again until both the purpose and one's own self are refined and ready.

The great and transforming truth is that being creative is a discovery of ourselves, of our own way of responding to life.

first hand compositions. It may not be wrong to state that AI will sacrifice originality at the altar of easy convenience.

Elvidio Miranda, Panjim

Woes of the Panjim market

At regular intervals, there are reports in the press about the woes ailing the CCP market at Panjim.

The reports are all about the sufferings of the public because of the poor maintenance and cleanliness of the market, as well as the difficulties faced by the vendors due to poor maintenance, leaky roof, erratic electric supply, irregular water supply and more.

However what is conveniently forgotten and glossed over by all the parties is that the vast majority of the almost thousand vendors occupying the CCP market are actually allegedly illegal occupiers, who have been occupying the market for more than 20 years, without paying any rent or dues such as electricity and water maintenance and sanitary charges and without having a valid agreement with the CCP.

Indeed more than a decade ago, the High Court passed an order directing the authorities to ensure that the vendors sign lease agreements and pay arrears which now have exceeded Rs 20 crores. As result of this unfortunate status, the CCP is unable to provide better services to the residents of Panjim.

It is high time that the authorities and the public raise awareness about this undesirable situation, so that appropriate actions can be taken, which will benefit both the vendors and the public using the market.

Rosario Menezes, Vasco