

Lifestyle | Feature

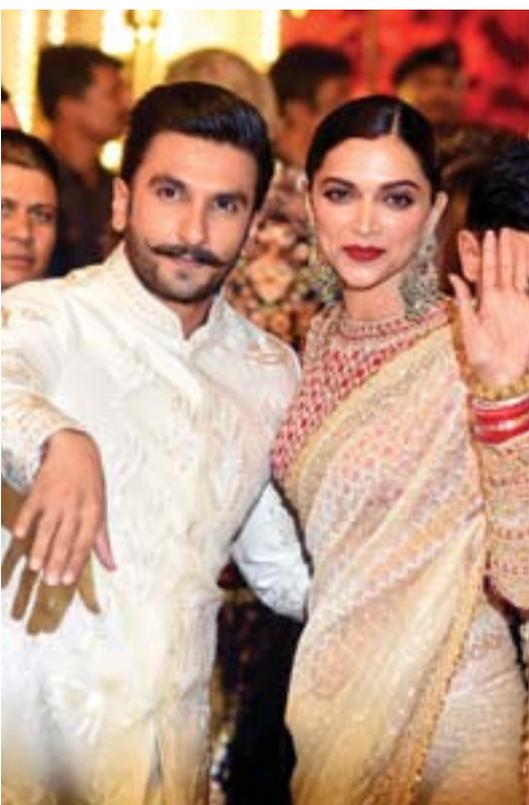


This handout photograph shows Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani's sons Akash (left) and Anand (right) taking part in a traditional marriage ritual of their sister Isha Ambani (center) to Indian businessman Ajay Piramal's son, Anand Piramal in Mumbai. — AFP photos



This handout photograph shows Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani's daughter Isha Ambani (right) taking part in traditional marriage ritual with Indian businessman Ajay Piramal's son, Anand Piramal in Mumbai.

Beyonce! Hillary! India revels in a very big wedding



Indian Bollywood actors Ranveer Singh (left) and Deepika Padukone attend the wedding of Indian businesswoman Isha Ambani with Indian businessman Anand Piramal in Mumbai.



Indian Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty.

In a season of big Indian weddings, the Wednesday marriage of the scions of two billionaire families might be the biggest of them all. The bride, Isha Ambani, is the Ivy League-educated daughter of industrialist Mukesh Ambani, thought to be India's richest man. Forbes estimates his net worth at over \$43 billion. The groom, Anand Piramal, is the relative pauper. His father, industrialist Ajay Piramal, is thought to be worth \$10 billion.

The wedding is being held in Mumbai on Wednesday but festivities began weeks ago, starting in September with an engagement party at a lakeside Italian palace. Over the weekend, thousands attended pre-wedding parties at a 16th century palace in the Indian desert city of Udaipur, where videos shot by partiers showed Hillary Clinton dancing with Shah Rukh Khan, one of India's biggest movie stars, as former US Secretary of State John Kerry danced just a few feet away. A highlight was a performance by Beyonce, who sang "Crazy In Love," among other hits, with a band backing her up and a series of costume changes that included at least one India-inspired outfit. "Beyonce Lights Up Udaipur," the Times of India shouted in a Tuesday headline.

Indian weddings are famously elaborate, driving many families into debt with expectations that they invite hundreds or thousands of people, and arranging professional song-and-dance shows. Among India's rich, weddings are displays of almost unimaginable wealth, with

guests flown in on chartered jets from around the world and celebrities paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for brief appearances. In 2004, a daughter of Indian steel baron Lakshmi Mittal held her engagement party at Versailles.

The Indian media noted that the actual Ambani wedding, in Mumbai, was expected to be a relatively small affair, with just 600 or so people in attendance. More parties will follow the marriage ceremony. Antilla, the Ambanis' 27-story Mumbai home, has been strung with lights for the wedding, looking like a small skyscraper at night. The family is said to have reserved hundreds of hotel rooms for their guests. Indian grooms traditionally ride to their weddings on horses, but Piramal arrived at the Ambani home in a classic Rolls Royce, with marching bands playing in the procession and scowling bodyguards scattered through the crowds.

Near the family home, Mumbai resident Kashyap Sompura said he was not bothered by the extravagance. "People, even when they don't have money, they take loans and do lavish weddings," said Sompura, 50. For someone of Ambani's wealth, "I don't think there is anything wrong with him sparing money for that." Mukesh Ambani controls the conglomerate Reliance Industries, which has businesses ranging from petroleum to chemicals to mobile phones. The Piramal family businesses include pharmaceuticals and real estate.

The competitiveness of India's wintertime wedding season is growing more extreme, ac-