

# A-listers on the guest list for pre-wedding of India's richest

India

Penelope MacRae Delhi

The guest list is said to include the Bollywood superstars Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan, Mark Zuckerberg, Bhutan's royal family and Hillary Clinton.

Entertainment will be provided by Rihanna, the Punjabi music star Diljit Dosanjh and, potentially, the American illusionist David Blaine. There will be hairstylists and make-up artists on hand for guests and those attending have been supplied with a nine-page dress code. Welcome to India's pre-wedding of the year.

On Friday, Indian high society and A-listers from around the world will gather in the western city of Jamnagar to celebrate the impending marriage of Anant Ambani, 28, the youngest son of one of India's richest men, Mukesh Ambani, and his childhood friend Radhika Merchant, 29, daughter of Viren Merchant, an industrialist.

Although the wedding is not until July 12, from March 1 guests will be flown in, many in private jets, for three days of celebrations extravagant even by the standards of Indian weddings.

"With hearts full of joy and excitement, we invite you to the pre-wedding celebrations of Anant and Radhika," the invitation from Mukesh Ambani and his wife Nita said. "We look forward to having you with us to share in our joy, love and laughter, and create memories we'll cherish for ever."

On the first day, there will be a

Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant are holding three days of festivities



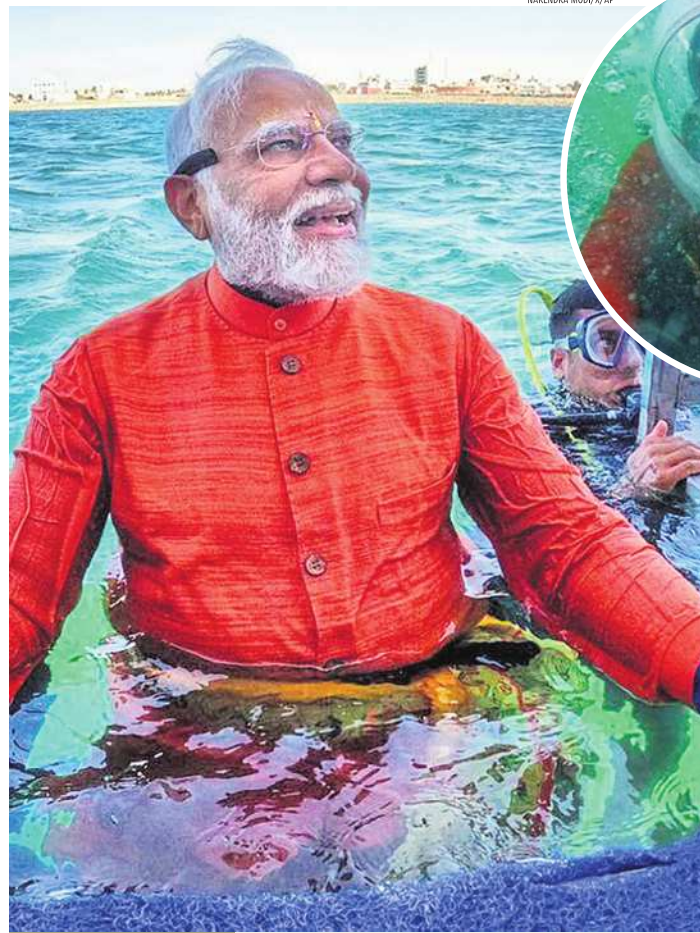
cocktail party called "an evening in everland". On the second day guests will be taken for "a walk on the wild side" to the nearby Reliance animal rescue centre, a pet project of the groom, for which the dress code is "jungle fever" and guests are advised to wear "comfortable shoes."

In the evening guests will participate in *mela rouge* — mela in Hindi means fair — and they have been asked to dress up in "dazzling" Indian outfits. On the final day, guests will spend the afternoon "surrounded by the wonders of nature" on "tusker trails". These will include more than 200 elephants, 300 big cats and 120 reptiles previously at risk of being sold or poached. The final party, *hastakshar*, which means signature, will be a regal affair featuring a "Heritage Indian" dress code.

The celebrations have plenty to live up to. When Ambani's sister Isha was married in 2018, it was reported to have cost \$100 million and included a performance by Beyoncé. His brother Akash had to make do with Coldplay.

Ambani's wedding celebrations, by contrast, are expected to be more laid back but still "promise to be the wedding of the year with all the glitz and glamour one can expect from the Ambani family", the fashion designer Ranjit Roderick said.

According to Indian media, other guests invited include Bill Gates, Bob Iger, the head of Disney, and Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al-Thani, the Qatari foreign minister. Previous family weddings were held in Mumbai, but the choice of Gujarat also happens to be where the Ambani family's company, Reliance, operates a giant refinery. Ambani, a politics and economics graduate of Brown University in the United States, wants to build the world's biggest zoo and animal rescue centre.



NARENDRA MODI/X/AP



Narendra Modi wore a saffron shirt, the colour of which symbolises purity, and a diving helmet, above

epic says. Archaeologists have tried to find evidence of the sunken city in an attempt to prove its existence and stone blocks, pillars and pottery have been discovered, but there is debate about the age of the finds.

"In our scriptures also, it is said about Dwarka that it was a city with beautiful gates and tall buildings, as tall as the top of the world. Lord Krishna himself constructed this city," Modi said.

With general elections due to start in April, Modi, leader of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, has been busy visiting temples to highlight his devotion.

This month he inaugurated a huge new temple in Ayodhya on the site of a centuries-old mosque that was razed by a Hindu mob in 1992. The temple opening marked the de facto launch of Modi's campaign for a third consecutive term.

Hindus believe the site of the temple is where the deity Rama was born, and the opening was a moment of celebration for many Hindus.

## Modi dives to pray in Krishna city

Narendra Modi has fulfilled "a decades-old dream" by diving into the Arabian Sea and praying underwater at the site of an ancient kingdom sometimes referred to as the Indian Atlantis (Penelope MacRae writes).

The Indian prime minister used a diving helmet, marked with

Indian flag, and wore a traditional long collarless saffron shirt and pyjamas. In Hinduism saffron symbolises purity.

Modi, who practises yoga daily, sat cross-legged underwater. He was held in place by scuba divers and he offered a peacock feather in tribute to Krishna, the Hindu god of protection, compassion and love.

According to the Mahabharata, the classic Hindu text, Krishna founded the kingdom on the site of what is modern-day Dwarka, in Gujarat, western India.

"To pray in the city of Dwarka, which is immersed in the waters, was a very divine experience. I felt connected to an ancient era of spiritual grandeur and timeless devotion," Modi said on social media on Sunday.

The city's ancient incarnation, referred to in the Mahabharata as Krishna, sprawled across nearly 96 sq km (37sq miles) where the Gomti river meets the Arabian Sea. The city, believed to have been a hub of grandeur, sank beneath the waves when Krishna died, the