VENICE, Italy — The historic lagoon city of Venice sat on the edge of a double threat. As in so many times before, that reality became more stark this week when Venice was hit with its worst flooding in more than 50 years, caused by a freak storm that sent seawater high enough flowing through St. Mark’s Square, cast the worst waist-high water flowing in modern times. It drew a spontaneous standing ovation and round applause of awe and gratitude from spectators and capped a revered first week of Venice's historic flood that caused Europe’s historic city to be under water.

Before dawn, 6-foot 5-inch waves breached the 1.85-meter line, the maximum level for protection against high tide, the city’s mayor said. The tide was expected to crest at 1.88 meters, or 6 feet 1 inch, later in the morning.

Mayor Luigi Brugnaro said the 1.88-meter benchmark was based on an average of the previous days. The benchmark is 1.95 meters, or 6 feet 5 inches, and if not reached, would be raised 0.1 meter.

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