

No sign of arson in cathedral blaze

The inferno consumed the roof and brought down the spire of the eight-centuries-old cathedral

REUTERS
PARIS

The fire that tore through Notre-Dame cathedral was probably caused by accident, French prosecutors said on Tuesday after firefighters doused the last flames in the ruins overnight and the nation grieved for the destruction of one of its symbols.

More than 400 firemen were needed to tame the inferno that consumed the roof and collapsed the spire of the eight-centuries-old cathedral. They worked through the night to extinguish the fire some 14 hours after it began.

Paris public prosecutor Remy Heitz said there was no obvious indication the fire was arson. Fifty people were working on what would be a long and complex investigation. One fire-fighter was injured but no one else was hurt in the blaze, which began after the building was closed to the public for the evening.

From the outside, the imposing bell towers and outer walls, with their vast flying buttresses, still stood firm, but the insides and the upper structure were eviscerated by the blaze.

Fire-fighters examined the gothic facade and could be seen walking atop the bell-towers as police kept the area in lockdown. Investigators will not be able to enter the cathedral's blackened nave until experts are satisfied its stone walls withstood the heat and the building is structurally sound.

The fire swiftly ripped through the cathedral's timbered roof supports, where workmen had been carrying out extensive renovations to the spire's wooden frame.

The Paris prosecutor has opened an investigation into "involuntary destruction by fire". Police on Tuesday be-

The treasures of Notre-Dame

The fire-gutted Notre-Dame cathedral contained some of the most sacred relics of the Christian faith, including the Holy Crown of Thorns, believed to have been worn by Jesus at his crucifixion



HOLY RELICS

■ Its most precious item, the Holy Crown of Thorns, is about 21 cm in diameter and made up of rushes braided together and bound by gold wire

■ Firefighters rescued the crown as well as a tunic worn by the 13th-century French crusader king, Louis IX, who was made a saint

■ Notre-Dame also held two other relics said to be from the crucifixion of Jesus — a piece of the cross on which he was nailed and one of the nails

THE GREAT ORGAN

■ Of the cathedral's three organs, the most impressive is the Great Organ with five keyboards, 109 stops and close to 8,000 pipes

■ Built in the 15th century, the organ was progressively added to over the centuries to become one of the largest in France

37 FIGURES OF VIRGIN MARY

■ A mid-14th century statue of the Virgin with Child, placed in the sanctuary, is the most famous of the 37 images of the Virgin Mary contained in the cathedral

■ Another depicts Mary holding the body of her son descended from the cross, created by French sculptor Nicolas Coustou between 1712 and 1728 and positioned behind the choir altar



PAINTINGS

■ Between 1630 and 1707, the Paris goldsmith guild presented the cathedral with a painting on every May 1. Of these, 76 works are called "The Mays"

■ On the west wall of the Chapel of Saint-Guillaume is one of the most beautiful paintings in the cathedral, the "Visitation", by Jean-Baptiste Jouvenet (1716)

13-TONNE BELL

■ The largest and oldest of the cathedral's bells is known as the Bourdon Emmanuel. Cast 300 years ago, it weighs 13 tonnes, its clapper alone weighing 500 kg

■ The tenor bell is chimed only on special occasions and important Catholic events, and was joined in 2013 by nine new bells



In shock: People pray in Paris as the cathedral burns. ■ AP

gan questioning the workers involved in the restoration, the prosecutor's office said.

'Still standing'

Hundreds of stunned on-lookers lined the banks of Seine river late into the night as the fire raged, reciting prayers and singing liturgical music in harmony as they stood in vigil.

"Yesterday, we thought the whole cathedral would collapse. Yet, this morning she is still standing, valiant, despite everything. It is a sign of hope," said Sister Marie Aimee, a nun who had hurried to a nearby church to pray as the fire spread.

It was at Notre-Dame that

Napoleon was made Emperor in 1804, Pope Pius X beatified Joan of Arc in 1909 and former presidents Charles de Gaulle and Francois Mitterrand were mourned.

President Emmanuel Macron promised to rebuild Notre-Dame within five years, considered among the finest examples of European Gothic architecture, visited by more than 13 million people a year.

Owned by the State, it has been at the centre of a years-long row between the nation and the Paris archdiocese over who should finance restoration work to collapsed balustrades, crumbling gargoyles and facades.

Hunchback of Notre-Dame now on top of bestseller list

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
PARIS

Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* shot to the top of the Amazon best-seller list on Tuesday.

The original French version of the gothic novel, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, became the fastest selling book in France and is also a number one bestseller worldwide in English in two sub-categories of historical fiction.

The Disney animated mo-

vie version of the story also rocketed into the top 10 of family films.

When Hugo began his 11-volume tale in 1829, Notre-Dame was crumbling. But his epic about the tragic fate of the Gypsy girl Esmeralda who captures the heart of Captain Phoebus, the poet Pierre Gringoire, Archdeacon Frolo — and most of all the hunchback Quasimodo — helped mobilise the mammoth 19th-century restoration of the monument.

Edited version of Russia probe report to be released

Democrats are calling for Mueller to testify before Congress

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

As Washington counts down the final hours until publication of the redacted Special Counsel report now expected on Thursday, President Donald Trump stepped up his attacks in an effort to undermine potential disclosures on Russia, his 2016 campaign and the aftermath.

"Mueller, and the A.G. based on Mueller findings (and great intelligence), have already ruled No Collusion, No Obstruction," Mr. Trump tweeted. "These were crimes committed by Crooked Hillary, the DNC, Dirty Cops and others! INVESTIGATE THE INVESTIGATORS!"

Press Secretary Sarah



William P. Barr

Sanders repeatedly tried to make the same case on TV talk shows on Sunday. But the political battle is far from finished over the Special Counsel's investigation of Russian efforts to help Mr. Trump in 2016 and whether there was cooperation with his campaign.

Democrats are calling for Mr. Mueller himself to testify

before Congress and have expressed concern that Attorney General William P. Barr will order unnecessary censoring of the report to protect the President. The House Judiciary Committee is poised to try to compel Mr. Barr to turn over an unredacted copy as well as the report's underlying investigative files.

The Justice Department said on Monday that it expects to release the redacted version on Thursday morning, sending the findings of the nearly two-year probe to Congress and making them available to the public.

Mr. Mueller officially concluded his investigation late last month and submitted the confidential report to Mr. Barr.

Bernie Sanders' tax returns show his millionaire status

His income spiked on royalties from sales of his recent book

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Self-described Democratic socialist Bernie Sanders, the 2020 presidential candidate who has long assailed America's growing income inequality, released 10 years of tax returns on Monday that confirm his new-found status as a millionaire.

The Senator, who routinely rails against "millionaires and billionaires" and the "rigged" economic system that protects their standing, saw his income spike on royalties from sales of his book, *Our Revolution*, published shortly after his 2016 race for the Democratic



Bernie Sanders

nomination.

According to tax returns released by the Sanders campaign, he had an adjusted gross income of \$5,61,293 in 2018, \$1,131,925 in 2017 and \$1,062,626 in 2016.

His 2015 income was substantially less, at \$240,622, the returns showed.

"These tax returns show that our family has been fortunate. I am very grateful for that, as I grew up in a family that lived paycheck to paycheck and I know the stress of economic insecurity," Mr. Sanders said in a statement.

"I consider paying more in taxes as my income rose to be both an obligation and an investment in our country."

The increased wealth of the liberal candidate has raised questions whether he can still speak for working-class Americans.

U.S. court unseals case against Gotabaya over 'torture'

Plaint alleges he was involved in the killing of a journalist

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

A U.S. District Court on Tuesday unsealed a civil lawsuit that seeks damages from Sri Lanka's former Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa for allegedly instigating and authorising torture and murder. The case was filed by Ahimsa Wickrematunge, daughter of slain Sri Lankan journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge, who was murdered a decade ago. After the complaint was filed earlier this month at a California court, Mr. Rajapaksa was served with the papers in Los Angeles, where he was on a private visit.

"The complaint alleges that Gotabaya Rajapaksa was involved in the extrajudicial killing of journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge as well as the widespread and systematic targeting of other



Gotabaya Rajapaksa

journalists perceived to be critical of the Rajapaksa government," according to the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), a San Francisco-based human rights legal organisation, whose lawyers were involved in preparing the complaint.

While the current government led by President Maithripala Sirisena in 2015 promised to probe murders, including Mr. Wickrematunge's, during the previous

regime, the cases have seen little progress since.

A dual citizen of Sri Lanka and the U.S., Gotabaya Rajapaksa is said to be considering entering the Presidential fray this year, as a 2015 legislation bars his older brother and former President Mahinda Rajapaksa from seeking a third term. The case comes at a time when Gotabaya Rajapaksa is trying to renounce his American citizenship, since Sri Lankan law prohibits those with dual citizenship from contesting. Denying charges, Mr. Gotabaya, who returned to Sri Lanka last week, told supporters he did not anticipate any difficulty in his citizenship renunciation process. "His lawyers will take due action in the U.S. if required," his spokesman Milinda Rajapaksa told *The Hindu*.

MPs vote extends Sisi's rule till 2030

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
CAIRO

Members of Egypt's Parliament on Tuesday approved changes to the Constitution that will allow President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to stay in power until 2030, State media reported.

The changes to extend presidential terms are part of amendments initially introduced in February by a parliamentary bloc supportive of Mr. Sisi and updated this week after several rounds of debates.

"The President's current term shall expire at the end of six years from the date of his election as President in 2018," reported the broadcaster Nile TV. "He can be re-elected for another (six-year) term."

The amendments are expected to be put to a public referendum later this month.

Sudan's prosecutor general ousted

Protesters want the ruling military council to meet their demands

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KHARTOUM

Sudan's new military ruler General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan sacked the country's prosecutor general on Tuesday, the military council said, after protesters demanded he be fired.

"Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan has issued a declaration sacking the Prosecutor General Omer Ahmed Mohamed," the council said.

The Lieutenant General has appointed Al-Waleed Sayyed Ahmed as the country's new acting prosecutor general, the council added.

Protests had rocked Sudan for nearly four months, resulting in the ouster of President Omar al-Bashir last week after three decades of iron-fisted rule.



Protest dance: A Sudanese band performing during a sit-in protest outside the Defence Ministry in Khartoum. ■ REUTERS

But in less than a week, the initial jubilation has turned into anger against Sudan's new military rulers as protesters remain camped outside the army complex.

At first, they pressed the Army to back their calls to oust Mr. Bashir. Since his departure, they

have called on the ruling military council to meet the demands of their "revolution".

On Monday, they hardened their position, demanding the military rulers exit.

Meanwhile, Uganda said it would consider granting asylum to Mr. Bashir.

IN BRIEF



New York museum scraps Bolsonaro event

NEW YORK
New York's Museum of Natural History has cancelled a private function to honour Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. He has been attacked for policies that threaten indigenous communities. ■ AFP

Iran labels U.S. troops in West Asia as 'terrorist'

TEHRAN
Iran's lawmakers on Tuesday overwhelmingly approved a bill labelling U.S. forces in the West Asia as terrorist, a day after the U.S. terrorism designation for Iran's Revolutionary Guard formally took effect, state TV reported. ■ AP