Massive fire engulfs Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris

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Associated Press

AP Photo/Thibault Camus

People watch as flames and smoke rise from Notre Dame cathedral as it burns in Paris on Monday. Massive plumes smoke are filling the air above Notre Dame Cathedral and ash is falling on tourists and others around the island that marks the center of Paris.

PARIS — A catastrophic fire engulfed the upper reaches of Paris' soaring Notre Dame Cathedral as it was undergoing renovations on Monday, threatening one of the greatest architectural treasures of the Western world as tourists and Parisians looked on from the streets below.

The blaze collapsed the cathedral's spire and spread to one of its landmark rectangular towers. Paris fire chief Jean-Claude Gallet said the church's structure had been saved after firefighters managed to stop the fire spreading to the northern belfry. The 12th-century cathedral is home to incalculable works of art and is one of the world's most famous tourist attractions, immortalized by Victor Hugo's 1831 novel "The Hunchback of Notre Dame."

The exact cause of the blaze was not known, but French media quoted the Paris fire brigade as saying the fire is "potentially linked" to a $6.8 million renovation project on the church's spire and its 250 tons of lead. The Paris prosecutors' office ruled out arson and possible terror-related motives, and said it was treating it as an accident.

Flames shot out of the roof behind the nave of the cathedral, among the most visited landmarks in the world. Hundreds of people lined bridges around the island that houses the church, watching as acrid smoke rose in plumes. Speaking alongside junior Interior minister Laurent Nunez late Monday, Gallet said "two thirds of the roofing has been ravaged." Gallet said firefighters would keep working overnight to cool the building.

Late Monday, signs pointed to the fire nearing an end as lights could be seen through the windows moving around the front of the cathedral, apparently investigators inspecting the scene.

The fire came less than a week before Easter amid Holy Week commemorations. As the cathedral burned, Parisians gathered to pray and sing hymns outside the church of Saint Julien Les Pauvres across the river from Notre Dame while the flames lit the sky behind them.

French President Emmanuel Macron was treating the fire as a national emergency, rushing to the scene and straight into meetings at the Paris police headquarters nearby. Paris Archbishop Michel Aupetit invited priests across France to ring church bells in a call for prayers for the beloved Paris cathedral.

Deputy mayor Emmanuel Gregoire said emergency services were trying to salvage the famed art pieces stored in the cathedral.

Built in the 12th and 13th centuries, Notre Dame is the most famous of the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages. Situated on the Ile de la Cite, an island in the Seine river, its architecture is famous for its many gargoyles and its iconic flying buttresses.

Among the most celebrated artworks inside are its three stained-glass rose windows, placed high up on the west, north and south faces of the cathedral. Its priceless treasures also include a Catholic relic, the crown of thorns, which is only occasionally displayed, including on Fridays during Lent.

French historian Camille Pascal told BFM broadcast channel the blaze marked "the destruction of invaluable heritage."

"It's been 800 years that the Cathedral watches over Paris," Pascal said. "Happy and unfortunate events for centuries have been marked by the bells of Notre Dame."

He added: "We can be only horrified by what we see."

AP Photo/Christopher Dolan

Presidential candidate and U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) speaks Monday in Pennsylvania.

Bernie Sanders releases 10 years of tax returns

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders on Monday released 10 years of his long-anticipated tax returns as he campaigns for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination.

His 2018 return reveals that he and his wife, Jane, earned more than $550,000, including $133,000 in income from his Senate salary and $391,000 in sales of his book, "Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In."

The filings show that Sanders, who throughout his career has called for an economy and government that works for everyone and not just the 1 percent, is among the top 1 percent of earners in the U.S.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, families in the U.S. earning $421,926 or more a year are part of this group.

During his first presidential bid, Sanders released one year of his tax returns — his 2014 return — and it was not a major issue in the Democratic primary contest. But this year, as President Donald Trump has continued to refuse to release his full tax returns and House Democrats are forcing the issue, tax transparency has grown in prominence.

Sanders' status as a millionaire, which he acknowledged last week, was cemented in his 2017 statement. That year, Sanders disclosed $1.31 million income, combined from his Senate salary and $961,000 in book royalties and sales.

Sanders, 77, said that the returns show that his family has been "fortunate," something he is grateful for after growing up in a family that lived paycheck to paycheck.

"I consider paying more in taxes as my income rose to be both an obligation and an investment in our country. I will continue to fight to make our tax system more progressive so that our country has the resources to guarantee the American Dream to all people," Sanders added.