

International



PARIS: Photo shows a general view of Notre-Dame Cathedral seen from the Pantheon in Paris, in the aftermath of a fire that caused its spire to crash to the ground. — AFP

Notre-Dame fire was 'God's punishment': Serb tabloids

YouTube accidentally links Notre-Dame fire to 9/11 attacks

BELGRADE: The fire that has devastated Notre-Dame is "God's punishment" two Serbian tabloids said Monday, linking it to a tweet saying a Kosovo flag was displayed in the Paris cathedral for World War I centennial commemorations last year. "God's punishment caught them," read headlines of Alo and Informer tabloids online editions late Monday.

However, the two outlets, both close to Serbia's rulers, withdrew the articles later. Alo called the blaze was punishment for "spitting on Serb victims" in the 1990s war in Kosovo, a breakaway province of Serbia where ethnic Albanians, with US and NATO backing, won self-rule in 1999. Serbia has rejected Kosovo's 2008 claim to independence, and is sensitive to any international recognition of Kosovo as a standalone state.

A tweet attributed to Serbia's ambassador to Paris posted last November said that Kosovo's flag was among those of other countries decorating the inside of Notre-Dame Cathedral for a ceremony marking the centenary of

the end of World War I. Although there was no confirmation of that from the cathedral or French authorities, the assertion - picked up by Serbian media - further strained French-Serbian relations already taut because of the presence of Kosovo President Hashim Thaci at the commemorations near to Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic.

Serbia is currently marking the 20th anniversary of the NATO bombing campaign that forced its troops out of Kosovo in 1999, a period that evokes national trauma and humiliation. Vucic, however, joined other world leaders in expressing solidarity with France over the Notre-Dame fire, saying on Twitter that "all Serbian citizens are sad" and are with their "French friends" and that his country was prepared to help with the cathedral's reconstruction.

Linked to 9/11 attacks

In another development, a YouTube fact-check feature which is meant to tackle misinformation accidentally tagged live broadcasts of a fire engulfing Notre-Dame

Cathedral in Paris with details about the 9/11 terror attacks. The blaze erupted in the UNESCO world heritage landmark in the French capital Monday, sending its spire and roof crashing to the ground as flames and clouds of smoke billowed into the sky. The fire, which at one point threatened the entire edifice, was extinguished Tuesday around 15 hours after it first broke out.

News outlets began live-streaming broadcasts of the fire on YouTube, but below some of the clips an unusual text box popped up - an entry from the Encyclopedia Britannica about the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. In those attacks, Al-Qaeda militants hijacked two passenger planes and flew them into the towers of the World Trade Center in New York, causing them to collapse, while a third hijacked jet smashed into the Pentagon. Some 3,000 people were killed.

A spokesman for YouTube, which is owned by Google, said the text box feature - which is currently only available to users in the US and South Korea - had been disabled

for live streams related to the fire. "These panels are triggered algorithmically and our systems sometimes make the wrong call," the spokesman told AFP. "We are deeply saddened by the ongoing fire at the Notre-Dame Cathedral." The feature, which also links to other outside sources such as Wikipedia, was introduced last year after YouTube faced intense criticism over videos containing misleading and extreme content.

The panels are supposed to combat misleading videos about well-known events - such as the first successful manned landing on the moon - by presenting well-established facts, in a bid to stop the spread of conspiracy theories. YouTube, Facebook and Twitter came under fire last month after a horrific video of a gunman's deadly rampage at two New Zealand mosques was circulated on the sites. The Christchurch massacre, in which 50 people were killed, was live-streamed on Facebook, which moved to block the footage. But it was then shared repeatedly on the other two sites. — Agencies

Decades? Uncertainty over time needed to rebuild Notre-Dame

PARIS: Rebuilding the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris could take decades after it was gutted by a fire, experts warned Monday, even as its most senior cleric expressed hope he could celebrate mass there within years. Parisians and people around the world watched in horror on Monday evening as a huge fire ripped through the 850-year-old gothic cathedral, causing its spire and part of the vaulted roof to collapse and triggering a scramble to save its precious relics and artworks. Declaring that the "worst has been avoided", President Emmanuel Macron immediately vowed: "We will rebuild Notre-Dame together." And pledges of immense donations together already worth hundreds of millions within hours flooded in from the business world in France.

'Not in my lifetime'

But asked how long the restoration could take, Eric Fischer, head of the foundation in charge of restoring the 1,000-year-old Strasbourg cathedral, which recently underwent a three-year facelift, said: "I'd say decades." "The damage will be significant. But we are lucky in France to still have a network of excellent heritage restoration companies, whether small-time artisans or bigger groups," he told AFP.

Fischer said the ability to rebuild the colossal cathedral in a manner that respects its original form and character would depend on the plans, diagrams and other materials available to the architects. They would need "a maximum of historical data or more recent data gathered with modern technology such as 3D scans" of the kind used in the restoration of the Strasbourg cathedral, he said.

Stephane Bern, a TV presenter famous for his programs on mediaeval France who was recently

'Paris is disfigured': Tears and shock as Notre-Dame burns

PARIS: Crowds of stunned Parisians and tourists - some crying, others offering prayers - watched in horror in central Paris on Monday night as firefighters struggled for hours to extinguish the flames engulfing the Notre-Dame Cathedral. Flames ravaging the roof illuminated the outline of the monument's two square towers in a fiery glow, and were reflected in the waters of the Seine.

Along the Pont au Change bridge, which connects the Ile de la Cite with the Right Bank, the atmosphere was one of a vigil as hundreds of people watched in hushed silence as smoke rose into the night sky. Many were quietly singing an



PARIS: Bystanders look on as flames and smoke billow from the roof at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris. — AFP

appointed the government's representative on heritage, estimated the rebuilding would take "10 to 20 years minimum". Noting the restoration of Reims cathedral which was bombed during World War I took decades, an emotional Bern, 55, told French radio: "You know what hurts me the most? It's the idea that I will not see it again in my lifetime." "It will be rebuilt for future generations," he said.

'Decade a joke'

But Jack Lang, who served as a hugely prominent culture minister under the presidency of Francois Mitterrand, called for a much quicker turnaround. "Since yesterday I've been hearing that it will take a decade. That's a joke," an indignant Lang told AFP outside the cathedral yesterday. Pointing to the renovations in Strasbourg, he said: "We have to do the same thing here, not in 10-15 years but three years." The rector of Notre-Dame, Monsignor Patrick Chauvet, also attempted to strike a hopeful note. "I hope I will see that cathedral again in my

lifetime and that I will celebrate a mass there. I'm 67 now and if all goes well, even if it takes 10 years, I will be 77 and still able to do it," he told France Inter radio. As pledges of donations flooded in from around the world, the city of Paris and private individuals, Italy, Russia and Germany offered to send expert help. President Vladimir Putin of Russia offered to send "the best Russian specialists with rich experience in the restoration of national heritage monuments" while Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini promised "all the help we can give."

Oak shortage

In a sign of the scale of the challenge, France's top producer of oak said it was worried about the stock of oak available to rebuild the gutted wooden interior of the nave's roof. Sylvain Charlois of the Charlois group estimated that 1,300 oak trees had been used in the construction of the roof. "To constitute a big enough stock of oak logs of that quality will take several years," said Charlois, who has pledged to donate wood. — AFP

Gasps and cries of "Oh my god" erupted at 7:50 pm when the top portion of the church's spire came crashing down into an inferno that had spread to the entire roof. More gasps came a few seconds later when the rest of the spire collapsed, caught on the cameras of thousands of mobile phones. "Paris is disfigured. The city will never be like it was before," said Philippe, a communications worker in his mid-30s, who had biked over after being alerted of the fire by a friend. "I'm a Parisian, my father was a Parisian, my grandfather as well - this was something we brought our sons to see," he said. "I won't be showing this to my son." "It's a tragedy," he added. "If you pray, now is the time to pray."

Police cleared pedestrians away from the two islands in the river Seine, including the Ile de la Cite which houses the soaring Gothic church, one of Europe's best-known landmarks. But throngs of onlookers remained behind police cordons on the stone bridges leading to the islands and along the banks of the Seine river as darkness fell. — AFP

The treasures of Notre-Dame

PARIS: 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. While firefighters were able to save the crown as Monday's massive blaze tore through the building in the heart of Paris, the fate of other items inside the 850-year-old Gothic cathedral is unclear. Here is an overview of some of the treasures contained in the venerated Notre-Dame (Our Lady) Cathedral:

Holy relics

Its most precious item, the Holy Crown of Thorns, is about 21 centimeters (eight inches) in diameter and made up of rushes braided together and bound by gold wire. Firefighters who were directed to the cathedral's most treasured objects rescued the crown as well as a tunic worn by 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. There were three holy items in the spire that collapsed in flames on Monday: a fragment of the Crown of Thorns and relics from Saint Denis and Saint Genevieve, two of the city's most cherished saints.

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. It survived the 18th century French Revolution unscathed, even though the building was vandalized, "thanks no doubt to its use in playing patriotic music," the cathedral website says. Culture Minister Franck Riester said the organ "seems to be quite badly damaged".

Stained glass

The cathedral's three impressive stained glass circular rose windows were built in the 13th century and renovated several times. The one on the south appeared to be in tact on Tuesday, as did another on the western facade which lies between the two stone towers which can be climbed by tourists on the front of the cathedral. AFP was unable to verify the state of the northern window. They show prophets, saints, angels, kings and scenes of the daily lives of holy figures. At the centre of each is an image of either the Virgin Mary, Christ as a baby or Christ as king reigning over heaven.

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 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 called "The Mays", 13 were displayed in various chapels in the cathedral. On the west wall of the Chapel of Saint-Guillaume is the 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 tons, its clapper alone being 500 kilograms. The tenor bell, considered one of the finest examples in Europe, is chimed only on special occasions and important Catholic events, and was joined in 2013 by nine new bells. It only just managed to avoid being melted down during the revolution and rang out to announce the liberation of Paris from German occupation in 1944. — AFP



DOROGNE: A picture shows statues which sat around the spire of the Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris, stored in SOGRA workshop before restoration. — AFP