

## Archbishop's Apology for Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

### What is the issue?

- Many leaders from the United Kingdom (UK) tip-toed around giving a formal apology for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in the past few years.
- The current Archbishop of Canterbury has spoken on the matter as he paid a visit to the Jallianwala Bagh memorial in Amritsar.

### What happened now?

- The current Archbishop of Canterbury said that he was “ashamed and sorry for the massacre”.
- He further added that he could not speak on behalf of the British government since he is a religious leader and not a politician.
- The reason why the UK hasn't apologised till now is that admitting blame could have legal and financial consequences.
- While a formal apology may be seen as an embarrassment for the UK in perpetuity, it could, at least in a court of law, imply admitting liability.

### What is the story behind Jallianwala Bagh Massacre?

- The massacre took place on April 13, 1919, the day of Baisakhi, a festival observed in Punjab to mark the beginning of the harvest season.
- On this day, a group of unarmed civilians gathered at Jallianwala Bagh were fired at by British troops on the order of Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer.
- Over 400 were killed as a result which included children as well.

### What is the history of reluctance in accepting blame?

- **Former British Prime Minister David Cameron** on his visit to India in February 2013 had described the Jallianwala Bagh massacre as a “deeply shameful event in British history”.
- Cameron also invoked then secretary of state for war Winston Churchill, who in 1920 referred to the killings as monstrous.
- Even though he did not make a formal apology, Cameron's remarks were in contrast to what **Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Phillip** had said during their visit to the site in 1997.
- The Queen called it a distressing episode while the Prince questioned the credentials of the massacre saying that the incident was exaggerated.

- Even so, Cameron stopped short of making a formal apology when he visited the massacre site, the only British prime minister at that time to do so in the 94 years since the incident occurred in 1919.
- In November 2016, Shashi Tharoor had demanded an apology for the massacre to be delivered as part of the UK's reparations to India for the colonial exploitation by the British.
- In December 2017, after his visit to Amritsar, **London Mayor Sadiq Khan** had called for an apology from Britain for the massacre.
- After this, the UK Foreign Office released a statement that rightly condemned the deeply shameful act.
- During this time, veteran UK-Indian MP Virendra Sharma who was a member of the Labour Party at that time, revived his petition launched on the UK parliament's website earlier in 2017 calling for an apology.
- This year, the demand for an apology was revived since the year marks the centenary of the incident.
- In April 2019, **former Prime Minister Theresa May** expressed "regret" but did not deliver an absolute apology.
- A day after May's remarks, a Pakistani minister endorsed the demand saying that the British empire must apologise to the nations of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh on Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and Bengal famine.

### **What makes the Archbishop's apology significant?**

- The Archbishop of Canterbury serves as the head of the Church of England, which is a position that goes back almost 1400 years.
- Two archbishops preside over the Church of England, one is the archbishop of the province of Canterbury and the other is the archbishop of the province of York.
- The kings and queens of England are crowned by the former and he is ranked just after the princes of royal blood.
- He is also regarded as the spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion of churches and is referred to as the "primate of all England".
- Justin Welby holds this position since the year 2013. The Anglican Communion is spread all over the world, with over 85 million members.

**Source: The Indian Express**

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