

# Sri Lanka Explosions: More than 200 Killed, Churches and Hotels Targeted

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*More than 200 killed and at least 500 injured as eight explosions rocked Catholic churches and luxury hotels in Sri Lanka while Christians began Easter Sunday celebrations.*

Media report said:

The blasts started at around 8:45am local time at St. Anthony's Church in Colombo and St. Sebastian's Church in Negombo, a Catholic-majority town outside of the capital. The Zion Church in Batticaloa on the eastern coast was also targeted. At around the same time, the Shangri-La, Cinnamon Grand and Kingsbury five-star hotels were also hit.

Two more explosions happened later in the day, targeting two more locations in Colombo. All attacks appear to have been coordinated.

At least 207 people were killed, *Reuters* reported, citing police.

An earlier report cited the number of wounded as more than 450.

The five-star Shangri-La, Kingsbury and Cinnamon Grand hotels in the heart of Colombo were also targeted.

Congregations were taking part in Easter Sunday services at the churches when the blasts hit.

The death toll could rise significantly as hospitals report casualty figures.

At least nine foreign nationals are known to have died.

A curfew has been imposed from 18:00 to 06:00 local time (12:30-00:30 GMT).

Seven arrests have been made.

The government also said there would a temporary block on the use of major social media networks.

No-one has yet claimed responsibility for the attacks but the defense minister said they were probably carried out by one group.

St Sebastian's church in Negombo was severely damaged. Images on social media showed

its inside, with a shattered ceiling and blood on the pews. Dozens of people are reported to have died there.

There were heavy casualties too at the site of the first blast in St Anthony's, a hugely popular shrine in Kochchikade, a district of Colombo.

Hospital sources in Batticaloa said at least 27 people had died there.

A hotel official at the Cinnamon Grand, near the prime minister's official residence, told *AFP* the explosion there had ripped through a restaurant, killing at least one person.

A seventh explosion was later reported at a hotel near the zoo in Dehiwala, southern Colombo, with police sources reporting two deaths. The zoo has been closed.

An eighth explosion was reported near the Colombo district of Dematagoda. Media said it was suicide bomber and that three people, believed to be security personnel, were killed during a police raid.

Citizens formed long queues as they joined in front of blood donation centers or hospitals to donate blood.

Police advised people to stay inside their houses and remain calm.

There is a heavy military presence in front of all major state buildings. No-one was expecting this, it was a peaceful Sunday morning – everyone was going to Easter services.

Priests were shocked as they have not imagined such attack.

Announcing the curfew, **Defense Minister Ruwan Wijewardane** said:

“We will take all necessary action against any extremist group that is operating in our country.”

He also said that “all the culprits” had been identified and would be “taken into custody as soon as possible”.

Another minister, **Harsha de Silva**, described “horrible scenes” at St Anthony's Shrine in Kochchikade, saying he had seen “many body parts strewn all over”.

**Pope Francis**, in his traditional *Urbi et Orbi* speech at the Vatican, condemned the attacks as “such cruel violence” which had targeted Christians celebrating Easter.

Cardinal Archbishop of Colombo, **Malcolm Ranjith**, told the *BBC*:

“It's a very difficult and a very sad situation for all of us because we never expected such a thing to happen and especially on Easter Sunday.”

*BBC Sinhala* reporter Azzam Ameen informed that two suspects have been detained in the Dematagoda area of Colombo and seven suspects arrested in total.

He quoted Sri Lanka's defense minister as saying most of the blasts were suicide attacks carried out by one group. No group has not claimed responsibility of the attacks.

A report said:

"A foreign intelligence agency has reported that the NTJ (National Thowheeth Jama'ath) is planning to carry out suicide attacks targeting prominent churches as well as the Indian high commission in Colombo."

The NTJ is a radical Muslim group in Sri Lanka that came into the spotlight after it was linked to vandalism of Buddhist monuments in the country, where Buddhism is the predominant religion.

The million dollar question is why did the agencies allowed this atrocity to happen even though there was clear intelligence warnings of terrorist attacks.

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