

## **207 killed, over 400 injured in Sri Lanka serial blasts targeting churches, hotels on Easter**

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Multiple blasts were reported in Sri Lanka on Sunday morning at three churches and two hotels in Colombo and other parts of the island nation.

***Blasts have ripped apart churches in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday.***

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

1. Serial blasts strike Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday
2. Multiple churches and luxury hotels were targeted in the blasts
3. At least 207 people have been killed and over 400 others injured in the blasts

FIVE Brits are among 207 people killed in a devastating Easter Sunday terror attack on eight churches and luxury hotels in Sri Lanka today.

Nearly 500 were injured when suicide bomb blasts ripped through buildings in Colombo - where tourists were eating breakfast and Christian worshippers had gathered for morning mass.

Although no group or individual has claimed responsibility for the attack so far, local media reports suggest suicide bombers could be behind the ghastly attack on Sri Lanka.

Reports suggest, Sri Lankan police had sounded a nationwide alert 10 days before the blasts on Sunday about suicide bombers planning attacks on churches.

At the St. Sebastian's Church in Katuwapitiya, north of Colombo, more than 50 people had been killed, a police official told Reuters, with pictures showing bodies on the ground, blood on the pews and a destroyed roof.

Media reported 25 people were also killed in an attack on a church in Batticaloa in Eastern Province.

Sri Lanka Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is holding an emergency meeting to discuss the situation.

The blasts occurred at 8.45 a.m. (local time) as the Easter Sunday masses were in progress, police spokesman Ruwan Gunasekera said.

The Sri Lankan army has deployed 200 troops to ensure security.

The government has declared two days' holiday in schools in Sri Lanka after the blasts shocked the nation on Sunday.

"I strongly condemn the cowardly attacks on our people today. I call upon all Sri Lankans during this tragic time to remain united and strong," the prime minister said in a tweet.

Security has been heightened in Sri Lanka and no visitors will be allowed at the Colombo airport in the aftermath of the blasts. All passengers have been requested to reach the airport 4 hours before their flights.

Security of all foreign missions stationed in Sri Lanka has been beefed up.

Three churches - St Anthony's Church in Colombo, St Sebastian's Church in the western coastal town of Negombo and another church in the eastern town of Batticaloa - were targeted, police said.

Three explosions were reported from the five-star hotels, the Shangrila, the Cinnamon Grand and the Kingsbury.

St. Sebastian's church at Katuwapitiya in Negombo posted pictures of destruction inside the church on its Facebook page, showing blood on pews and the floor, and requested help from the public.

This is biggest such attack on Sri Lanka in several years.

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***This image made from video, released by Derena TV, shows women in despair after an explosion in Colombo***

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**on 21 April.**

The Indian High Commission has issued helpline numbers in a tweet. Indian citizens in need of assistance or help and for seeking clarification may call the following numbers : +94777903082 +94112422788 +94112422789.

Reports suggest the Christian community in Sri Lanka has been targeted in particular on Easter.

Last year, there were 86 verified incidents of discrimination, threats and violence against Christians, according to the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), which represents more than 200 churches and other Christian organisations.

This year, the NCEASL recorded 26 such incidents, including one in which Buddhist monks allegedly attempted to disrupt a Sunday worship service, with the last one reported on March 25.

Out of Sri Lanka's total population of around 22 million, 70 percent are Buddhist, 12.6 percent Hindu, 9.7 percent Muslim, and 7.6 percent Christian, according to the country's 2012 census.

***The tragic last picture of Nisanga Mayadume and her family eating breakfast before the fatal explosion***

***Inside St Anthony's Shrine after an explosion hit the church in Kochchikade in Colombo***

***A statue of the Virgin Mary broken in two parts at the front of the bombed St Anthony's Shrine***

***A body is carried out from the rubble of a bombed building***

***A soldier picks through the destruction outside a church targeted in a horrifying attack***

***Police investigators look through debris outside Zion Church following an explosion in Batticaloa***

***Witnesses bow their heads as they take in the devastation in Colombo this morning***

***Multiple buildings have been destroyed throughout the capital this morning - with hundreds of victims***

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- IT, IE, The Sun