

The victims?

The blasts hit the churches when they were full of worshippers gathered for Easter services. A photographer saw bodies and debris lying on the floor at St Anthony's.

A detailed breakdown of casualties in the eight blasts and the nationalities of victims was not immediately available.

A Sri Lankan foreign ministry official said there were 27 bodies of suspected foreign nationals, while the police said at least 35 of the dead were foreigners.

Hospital sources said British, Dutch and American citizens were among those killed, with Britons and Japanese also injured. A Portuguese man also died, according to the Iberian nation's LUSA news agency. Two Chinese nationals were injured, the country's embassy said.



An injured Sri Lankan woman lays on a stretcher

US: 'Senseless attacks'

“Heartfelt condolences from the people of the United States to the people of Sri Lanka on the horrible terrorist attacks on churches and hotels,” he tweeted. “We stand ready to help!”

The US leader erroneously wrote that “138 million people” were killed in the attacks.



EU: 'Sad day for the world'

EU commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker expressed his “horror and sadness” at the blasts, while EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said the attacks marked “a truly sad day for the country and for the world”.

“Such acts of violence on this holy day are acts of violence against all beliefs and denominations, and against all those who value the freedom of religion and the choice to worship,” she added in a statement.



Unleashed devastation



Sri Lankan security personnel walk past debris outside Zion Church

AFP | Colombo, Sri Lanka

The suicide bomber waited patiently in a queue for the Easter Sunday breakfast buffet at Sri Lanka's Cinnamon Grand hotel before setting off explosives strapped to his back.

Carrying a plate, the man, who had registered at the hotel the night before as Mohamed Azzam Mohamed, was just about to be served when he set off his devastating strike in the packed restaurant, a manager at the Sri Lankan hotel said.

“There was utter chaos,” said the manager, who spoke on condition of anonymity as he is not allowed to speak for the company.

The Taprobane restaurant at the hotel was having one of its busiest days of the year for the Easter holiday weekend.

“It was 8:30 am and it was busy. It was families,” the manager said.

“He came up to the top of the queue and set off the blast,” he added.

“One of our managers who was welcoming guests was among those killed instantly.”

The bomber also died. Parts of his body were found intact by police and taken away.

Other hotel officials told how the bomber, a Sri Lankan, checked in giving an address that turned out to be false, saying he was in the city for business.

Two other hotels, the Shangri-La and the



A relative of a Sri Lankan victim of an explosion at a church weeps outside a hospital in Batticaloa

Kingsbury, were hit at about the same time, along with three churches packed with worshippers attending Easter Sunday services.

The blast at St Anthony's Shrine, an historic Catholic Church, was so powerful that it blew out much of the roof, leaving roof tiles, glass and splintered wood littering the floor that was strewn with bodies.

Many of the 35 foreigners killed in the blasts were at the hotels, officials said.

'Shock, grief and mourning' -

“There was utter chaos, but we rushed all the injured to hospital in a very short time,” the Cinnamon Grand manager said.

“About 20 people were seriously wounded and we sent them to the National Hospital.”

The hotel is close to the Sri Lankan prime minister's official residence and Special Task Force commandos were quickly at the scene.

At the Shangri-La, witnesses said they heard two loud blasts and that staff reported some people had been killed. But details of the toll were not immediately given.

A photographer saw extensive damage in the second floor restaurant at the hotel, with windows blown out and electrical wires hanging from the ceiling.

The Shangri-La said in a statement that the bomb hit at approximately 9:00 am local time at its Table One restaurant.

“We are deeply saddened and shocked by the incident and our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the casualties and those who have been affected,” it said.

“Our immediate priority is to look after the safety and wellbeing of all involved. A Shangri-La crisis management team has been activated to provide all necessary support.”

The Kingsbury is also one of Colombo's most expensive hotels, positioned near the city's World Trade Center.

The toll there was not known.

In a statement on its Facebook page, the hotel said: “On behalf of the entire Kingsbury team we share in the shock, grief and mourning of our entire nation in the aftermath of the recent attack.”

“Medical evacuation and treatment of the injured guests and employees were handled immediately.”

Britain: 'Stand together'

British Prime Minister Theresa May described the attacks as “truly appalling”.

“The acts of violence against churches and hotels in Sri Lanka are truly appalling, and my deepest sympathies go out to all of those affected at this tragic time,” she tweeted.

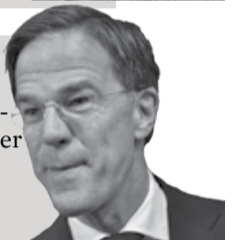
“We must stand together to make sure that no one should ever have to practise their faith in fear.”



The Netherlands: 'Terrible reports'

“Terrible reports from Sri Lanka about bloody attacks on hotels and churches on this Easter Sunday,” Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte tweeted after the attacks first emerged.

“Thoughts are with the victims and their relatives.”

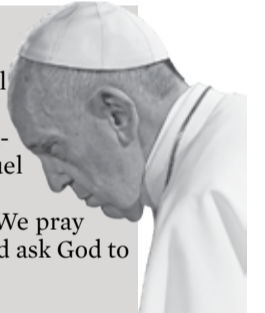


Pope: 'Cruel violence'

Pope Francis expressed his sadness over the attacks during his traditional Easter address at the Vatican.

“I want to express my affectionate closeness with the Christian community, attacked while it was at prayer, and to all the victims of such cruel violence,” he said.

The Catholic Church in Jerusalem had said in an earlier statement: “We pray for the souls of the victims and ask for speedy recovery of the injured, and ask God to inspire the terrorists to repent of their killing and intimidation.”



Australia: 'Terrorist attack'

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said in a statement: “To the beautiful people of Sri Lanka, Australia sends its heartfelt sympathies and our prayers and our support -- and our offer to do whatever we can to support you in this terrible time of need.”

“At this time as Easter Sunday draws to a conclusion here in Australia, our heart goes out to those Christians and all of those other innocents who have been slaughtered today in this horrific terrorist attack.”



New Zealand: 'Devastating'

A month after dozens of Muslims were killed in a shooting at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern described the attack as “devastating”.

“New Zealand condemns all acts of terrorism, and our resolve has only been strengthened by the attack on our soil on the 15th of March. To see an attack in Sri Lanka while people were in churches and at hotels is devastating.”

“New Zealand rejects all forms of extremism and stands for freedom of religion and the right to worship safely. Collectively we must find the will and the answers to end such violence.”

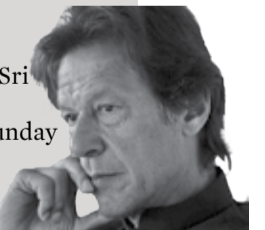


Pakistan: 'Horrific'

Pakistan's leader Imran Khan offered his “profound condolences” to Sri Lanka.

“Strongly condemn the horrific terrorist attack in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday resulting in precious lives lost & hundreds injured,” he tweeted.

“My profound condolences go to our Sri Lankan brethren. Pakistan stands in complete solidarity with Sri Lanka in their hour of grief.”



France: 'Odious acts'

“We strongly condemn these odious acts,” French President Emmanuel Macron wrote on Twitter.

“Full solidarity with the Sri Lanka people and our thoughts for all those close to the victims this Easter.”

