

Family’s
near
miss at
bombed
Sri Lanka
church



A woman prays at St. Sebastian’s Church in Negombo

Negombo, Sri Lanka

When Dilip Fernando arrived at St Sebastian’s church in Sri Lanka’s Negombo on Easter Sunday, it was so crowded he went elsewhere for mass. The decision probably saved his life.

Shortly after he left, a massive bomb ripped through the church as worshippers observed the Christian holiday. Dozens died there on a day of carnage across Sri Lanka that saw at least 290 people killed in eight blasts.

On Monday morning, Fernando returned to the church in the seaside town of Negombo to see the damage at the site where he

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Yesterday me and my wife arrived at 7:30 am but it was so crowded there was no place for me. I didn’t want to stand so I left and went to another church

DILIP FERNANDO

and his family narrowly escaped death.

“I usually come to services here,” the 66-year-old retiree told AFP, as around three dozen security personnel stood outside the church.

“Yesterday me and my wife arrived at 7:30 am but it was so crowded there was no place for me. I didn’t want to stand so I left and went to another church.”

But seven of Fernando’s extended family including in-laws and his two granddaughters decided to stay, sitting outside because the church was so crowded.

And it was there that they saw a man they believe was the suicide bomber behind the deadly

Sri Lankans stunned

● Little-known Islamist group NTJ (National Thowheeth Jama’ath) accused in Sri Lanka blasts

● At least 37 foreigners were among the dead, citizens of India, Britain, Turkey, Australia, Japan and Portugal, as well as a dual US-British passport holder

● Interpol is deploying a team of investigators, to help local authorities

● Three of the four children of Danish billionaire Anders Holch Povlsen were killed in the attacks

AFP | Colombo, Sri Lanka

As Shantha Prasad carried children wounded in Sri Lanka’s deadly attacks into a Colombo hospital, memories of the country’s deadly civil war flooded back.

“I carried about eight wounded children yesterday,” he said yesterday, a day after a string of blasts hit hotels and churches, killing nearly 300 people.

“There were two girls aged six and eight, the same age as my daughters,” said Prasad, who helps carry stretchers into the hospital’s triage area and wards.

“Their clothes were torn and drenched in blood. It is unbearable to see this kind of violence again.”

For many Sri Lankans, Sunday’s attacks against

churches and high-end hotels brought back painful memories of a conflict that lasted three decades and killed as many as 100,000 people.

During those years, bomb attacks were a regular occurrence, and left many Sri Lankans on edge in the streets and on public transport.

In the capital, street sweeper Malathi Wickrama said Monday she was now nervous doing her job.

“Now we are afraid to even touch black plastic bags with garbage,” she said.

“The string of blasts yesterday brings back memories of the time when we were afraid to go in buses or trains because of parcel bombs.”

‘We are resilient’

With the lifting of a nationwide curfew early Monday morning, people began to emerge into Colombo’s streets, where security was heavy.

Schools and the stock exchange are closed, but

some shops opened their doors and public transport was functioning.

Imtiaz Ali, a tuk-tuk driver, was looking for customers in the capital, but said his family was in mourning over the death of his nephew in the blast that hit the Cinnamon Grand hotel.

“The boy was just 23. He was a salesman at (the) Cinnamon Grand hotel and he was to be married next week,” Ali said.

“We had made all the plans to hold the wedding at home, but today it’s a funeral house.”

When Ali stopped at a petrol station to get a back-up container of fuel, the attendant said police had banned the sale of petrol and diesel in cans and bottles for fear they could be used to improvise bombs.

Elsewhere in the city, some residents were making their way into work,

determined to maintain a semblance of normality despite the tragedy.

“We are resilient people,” said Nuwan Samaraweera, a 50-year-old office worker.

“We have seen so much violence during the civil war. For the outside world it may be big, but for us life goes on,” he added.

“We have to gather ourselves and move on.”

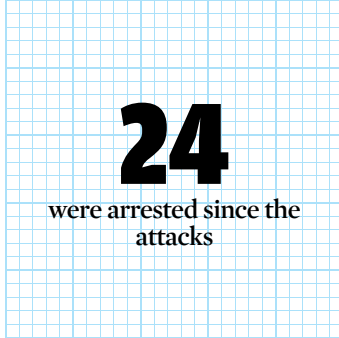
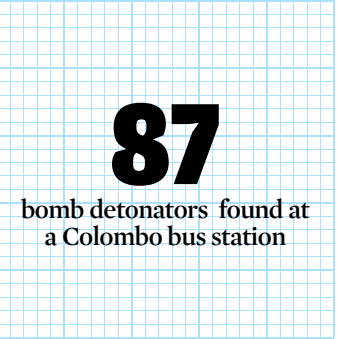
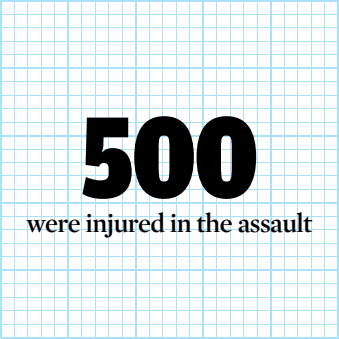
Ranjan Christopher Fernand, 55, said his friend’s 11-year-old son had been killed in Negombo.

“This is the first time Christians have been attacked like this in Sri Lanka,” he said, driving his taxi around the capital.

“Tonight we will go to the church to pray for the victims. Of course I feel afraid... but we have to go to church, we have to pray for the injured to get well soon.”

Improvised bomb

An improvised pipe bomb discovered close to Colombo’s main airport was successfully defused by the Sri



Lanka airforce, police said.

A police source said that a “homemade” pipe bomb had been found late Sunday on a road leading towards the main terminal, which remains open with heavy security after Easter Sunday’s deadly bomb attacks.

“It was a homemade bomb, with explosives put into a pipe,” said the source.

Airforce spokesperson Group Captain Gihan Seneviratne said the IED was believed to be locally manufactured.

The discovery comes after a series of eight devastating bomb blasts ripped through high-end hotels and churches holding Easter services, killing at least 207 people, including

dozens of foreigners.

“It was a crude six-foot pipe bomb that was found by the roadside,” an air force spokesman said. “We have removed it and safely defused it at an air force location.”

People pray outside the St. Anthony’s Shrine in Colombo



A Sri Lankan relative of a bomb blast victim weeps at a morgue in Colombo