

Sri Lanka churches halt public services

The president has asked the police chief and top defence ministry bureaucrat to step down

● **FBI team is now in Sri Lanka**

● **In all, nine people are believed to have blown themselves up**

● **Sri Lanka's top defence official Hemasiri Fernando resigned**

● **Authorities also announced a ban on drone flights**

AFP | Colombo, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's Catholic churches suspended all public services over security fears yesterday, as thousands of troops joined the hunt for suspects in deadly Easter bombings that killed nearly 360 people.

Security forces also made fresh arrests overnight over the attacks, as the government faced pressure over its failure to act on intelligence warnings about possible bombings.

Recriminations have flown since suicide bombers blew themselves up in luxury hotels and churches packed with Easter worshippers on Sunday.

Overnight, security forces using newly granted powers under the country's state of emergency arrested 16 more suspects in connection with the attacks.

Police have so far arrested 75 people but tensions remain high with several suspects unaccounted for.

A senior Catholic priest said that all public services were being suspended and all churches closed "on the advice of security forces". Private services for burials will still be carried out, but no public masses are scheduled.

Brigadier Sumith Atapattu said the army had increased its deployment by 1,300 to 6,300 overnight, with the navy and air force also deploying 2,000 more personnel. Authorities also announced a ban on drone flights and suspended licences issued to commercial operators with immediate effect.

Defence official resigns

Sri Lanka's government has come under increasing pressure over the revelation it failed to act on intelligence about planned attacks, which claimed nearly 360 lives, and Hemasiri Fernando had been widely expected to step down.

A defence ministry official said Fernando had submitted a letter of resignation to head-of-state Maithripala Sirisena.

"He told the president that he was accepting responsibility and resigning so that the president can make a new appointment," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Indian intelligence shared several specific warnings about attacks with Sri Lankan authorities, an Indian source said, but the information was not given to ministers, in what the government has called a "major" lapse.

Authorities are now in a desperate hunt for suspects linked to the attacks, and police yesterday released the names and photos of three men and three women they want to question.

"Most of them are well-educated and come from middle, upper-middle class families, so they are financially quite independent and their families are quite stable financially, that is a worrying factor in this," the minister added.

Security forces using state of emergency powers arrested 16 more suspects overnight, bringing the total in custody to 74.

Sirisena met with political party leaders on Thursday and announced he would revive a military-police body last used during the country's fight against Tamil insurgents to coordinate operations after the bombings.

Key suspect

An FBI team is now in Sri Lanka, Wijewardene said, and Britain, Australia and the United Arab Emirates have also offered intelligence help.

Experts say the bombings bear many of the hallmarks of IS attacks, and the government has suggested local militants could not have acted alone.

But it has not yet official-



Buddhist devotees pray for the bomb blast victims at Kelaiya temple in Colombo



Relatives carry the coffin of a bomb blast victim for a burial ceremony at a cemetery in Negombo on April 24, 2019, three days after a series of suicide attacks targeting churches and luxury hotels in Sri Lanka.



Anusha Kumari 43, wife of a St Sebastian's Church suicide blast victim Dulip Appuhami, 46, reacts as she cries in her house in Negombo



Investigators are still piecing information together about the attack and those involved, with Wijewardene revealing Wednesday that one attacker had studied in Britain and did post-graduate studies in Australia before returning to Sri Lanka

when police attempted to arrest them.

Sri Lankan police sources have

said that two Muslim brothers, sons of a wealthy Colombo spice trader, blew themselves up at the Shangri-La and the Cinnamon Grand hotels.

Their father is now in custody. The Kingsbury hotel in the capital was the last one hit. A fourth planned attack on a hotel failed, authorities said. The would-be attacker was followed back to a Colombo lodge, where he blew himself up, killing two people.

Sources close to the investigation said two more people -- a man and a woman -- blew themselves up at another location as security forces launched a raid. Those blasts killed three police.

Dozens of foreigners were among the victims of the blasts, including three children of a Danish billionaire, eight Britons, 10 Indians and four Americans.

The United Nations said at least 45 children, Sri Lankans and foreigners, were among the dead.

ly confirmed any IS role in the blasts.

A key suspect in the attacks also remains unaccounted for: NTJ leader Zahran Hashim.

He appears to be among eight people seen in a video released Tuesday by IS after it claimed the attacks, seen leading a pledge of allegiance to IS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Officials said it was still unclear whether Hashim was among the suicide attackers or had escaped after the blasts.

Authorities have said they cannot rule out further attacks while suspects remain at large.

In all, nine people are believed to have blown themselves up on Sunday, either during attacks or

Professional gambler raking in the cash on 'Jeopardy!'

New York, United States

A professional gambler with nerves of steel and an encyclopedic mind has just surpassed the \$1 million mark in earnings on the popular US television quiz show "Jeopardy!" -- in lightning quick fashion.

James Holzhauer, 34, is only the second contestant in the show's decades-long history to pass that mark in regular season play, after the legendary Ken Jennings. Well, legendary for the show's avid fans.

While it took Jennings, a computer scientist from Utah, 74 episodes to amass his fortune, Holzhauer has earned \$1.06 million in just 14 appearances.

The gambler with the wide grin is now aiming to best the \$2.52 million in prize money set by Jennings during his long string of victories in 2004.

"This is absolutely insane,"

Jennings said on Twitter of the success of Holzhauer, who has repeatedly broken his own record for the most money won on a single night -- it currently stands at \$131,127.

ESPN is covering Holzhauer's episodes on its Chalk betting section. Rock bands are tweeting at him when he answers questions about them.

"Dream job: pro sports bettor and Jeopardy contestant," Holzhauer tweeted.

How does he do it?

"Jeopardy!" is one of the oldest television quiz shows in the United States, dating back initially to 1964, and to 1984 in its current format with host Alex Trebek.

It is a testament to the show's beloved nature that when Trebek recently announced he was battling cancer, the news trend-



'Jeopardy!' winner James Holzhauer

ed on Twitter.

Every night, three contestants

are presented with trivia questions in various categories and

asked to come up with the answer -- in the form of a question.

A recent example: "Rulers of this Empire included Darius I and his son Xerxes I."

Holzhauer's correct answer: "What is Persia?"

A monetary value is attached to each question, and the first contestant to press a buzzer gets to answer.

Holzhauer has proved to be super fast on the buzzer.

But more importantly, in racking up the wins, he has also employed a novel -- but risky -- strategy befitting his day job in Vegas.

He frequently zeroes in on the high-value questions first to quickly amass money, and then unhesitatingly bets big -- really big -- on his ability to offer the correct answer when he lands on a special Daily Double question.

Explaining his success to ESPN, Holzhauer said: "There's not a lot of professional gamblers out there.

"Even if people wanted to be, I don't think a lot have the mindset that 'Oh, I can just put in \$10,000 and if I lose, OK, I move on with my game and keep playing the rest of the game with a level head."

Holzhauer's remarkable run has earned him legions of admirers -- including Jennings, the man whose record he is threatening to break.

"I've always wanted to see someone try Jeopardy! wagering this way who had the skills to back it up," Jennings said.

"I don't feel I get enough credit for making small, sensible Jeopardy wagers, which helped the show with its prize budget," he quipped in another tweet.