

Easter day bombings kill 200 in Sri Lanka. (2019, April 22). *The Times*.

Easter Day bombings kill 200 in Sri Lanka

● Co-ordinated suicide attacks on churches and luxury hotels ● Britons among the dead

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At least 207 people were killed and 450 injured as explosions tore through Easter church services and luxury hotels in Sri Lanka in co-ordinated attacks on the heart of the island's Christian community and tourism industry.

Five Britons and six other foreigners were among those confirmed to have died in six blasts aimed at worshippers in busy churches during prayers and tourists at breakfast at about 8.45am.

Two other detonations later in the day appeared to have come as security forces moved in on suspects and made a series of arrests. A large pipe bomb was found and defused at the country's main airport last night.

Suicide bombers struck St Sebastian's church in the town of Negombo, north of the capital Colombo, killing more than 50 worshippers at Mass on the holiest day of the Christian calendar. At about the same time, another bomber struck St Anthony's Shrine in the capital, one of Sri Lanka's most famous churches, consecrated in 1834.

Pictures showed bodies strewn across the floor and blood spattered over the pews and effigies of Christ. Much of the roof was blown off St Anthony's by the force of the blast. Dozens more people were killed in simultaneous attacks on the Zion church at Batticaloa in the east of the country.

Explosions then rocked the Shangri-La, Cinnamon Grand and Kingsbury hotels, which are popular with tourists. The seventh and eighth blasts were reported near Dehiwala zoo, in southern Colombo, and in the northern district of Dematagoda, as special forces fought a gun battle with suspects cornered in a housing estate. Three police officers were killed in the raid. Thirteen suspects were arrested and another escaped.

Sri Lanka's defence minister blamed religious extremists. He added that all or most of the attacks had been carried out by suicide bombers believed to be part of a single group. There was no



Anita Nicholson, 42, and her two children were thought to be among British victims. Their father, Ben, survived the attacks

claim of responsibility but attacks on Catholic churches and tourist sites by suicide bombers is a tactic previously employed by Islamic State, its sympathisers, and other jihadists. There have been fears that Isis militants returning from the Middle East could pose a threat in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan police had issued a warning to senior officials in the

Buddhist-majority country ten days before the blasts, citing foreign intelligence and warning that suicide bombers affiliated with the Muslim group NTJ (National Thowheeth Jamaath) planned to hit "prominent churches".

After the attacks the government imposed a nationwide curfew from 6pm to 6am and temporarily blocked access to social media. The bombings

appeared to be a "well co-ordinated attempt to create murder, mayhem and anarchy", one minister said.

The five dead Britons include two with dual US citizenship. A mother and her two children were feared to be among them. Anita Nicholson, 42, her son, Alex, 11, and his younger sister Annabel were thought to be having

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