

LANKA reels from horror

AGENCIES

Sri Lanka said yesterday it was invoking emergency powers in the aftermath of devastating bomb attacks on hotels and churches, blamed on militants with foreign links, in which 290 people were killed and nearly 500 wounded.

The emergency law, which gives police and the military extensive powers to detain and interrogate suspects without court orders, went into effect at midnight yesterday, the president's office said.

Colombo, the seaside capital of the Indian Ocean island, was jittery yesterday. Police said 87 bomb detonators were found at the city's main bus station, while an explosive went off near a church where scores were killed on Sunday when bomb squad officials were trying to defuse it.

A night curfew went into effect at 8:00 pm yesterday.

Interpol is deploying a team of investigators, including experts in disaster victim identification, to Sri Lanka to help local authorities, the international police organisation said yesterday.

There was no claim of responsibility for the eight blasts but suspicion was focusing on Islamist militants in the Buddhist-majority country.

Investigators said seven suicide bombers took part in the attacks while a government spokesman said an international network was involved.

Police had received a tip-off of a possible attack on churches by a little-known domestic Islamist group some 10 days ago, according to a document seen by Reuters.

The intelligence report, dated April 11 and seen by Reuters, said a foreign intelligence agency had warned authorities of possible attacks on

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➤ Eight blasts hit 3 churches, 4 hotels in Colombo, other places

➤ Five-star Shangri-La, Kingsbury and Cinnamon Grand hotels targeted in coordinated attacks

➤ Local Islamist group "National Thowheed Jamath" believed to be behind the attack

➤ 24 people arrested

➤ Emergency declared from Monday midnight

**DEATH TOLL 290
INJURED 500**

Mystery shrouds source of attacks

Global terror links suspected

AGENCIES

It is one of the most lethal terrorist operations since September 11 -- with a death toll of at least 290 people. That number will almost certainly rise, given the hundreds that were also injured in the eight attacks at churches and hotels in Sri Lanka on Sunday.

What is puzzling about the attacks is that while Sri Lanka has seen plenty of terrorism in the past -- a result of the civil war between the separatist Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government -- that war ended a decade ago. And the Tamil Tigers had notably focused their attacks on "transit hubs, Buddhist shrines, and office buildings ... and Sri Lankan officials," rather than churches, according to a Council on Foreign Relations report.

Sri Lankan Defense Minister Ruwan Wijewardene told reporters the "terrorist incident" was carried out by those following "religious extremism." While no group has claimed responsibility yet, the targets of the attacks -- churches packed with the faithful on Easter Sunday and three hotels catering to foreigners -- have also figured in previous attacks.

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Sheikh Selim's grandson among dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A grandson of Awami League Presidium Member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim was killed in the series of blasts that tore through churches and hotels in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday.

Eight-year-old Zayan Chowdhury was having breakfast with his father Moshikul Haque Chowdhury Prince at the restaurant of a hotel in Colombo when the explosion occurred, family sources said.

Injured Moshikul is currently undergoing treatment in Colombo.

Moshikul and his wife

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