

Easter Sunday bombings: Lanka bans three extremist organisations, UN voices alarm over violence

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Easter Sunday bombings: Sri Lanka President Maithripala Sirisena issued an extraordinary gazette banning a number of extremist organisations on Monday. He also prohibited the use of drones in the country until further notice.

Easter Sunday Bombings: Sri Lankan military stand guard outside a mosque after clashes between two sectarian groups in a beachside resort in Poruthota village in Negombo, Sri Lanka May 6, 2019.

REUTERS/Stringer

In the aftermath of the country's worst terror attack on Easter Sunday, Sri Lankan government has banned three Islamist extremist groups, including the National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ), which was responsible for carrying out the deadly bombings that left over 250 people dead, reported PTI.

President Maithripala Sirisena issued an extraordinary gazette banning a number of extremist organisations on Monday. He also prohibited the use of drones in the country until further notice.

According to the Gazette the National Thowheed Jamaath (NTJ), the Jamaathe Millaathe Ibrahim (JMI), and the Willayath As Seylani (WAS) organisations have been banned.

A Muslim man reacts inside the Abbraar Masjid mosque after a mob attack in Kinyama, Sri Lanka May 13, 2019. REUTERS/Dinuka Liyanawatte

Earlier in the day, a Muslim man was killed and dozens of shops and mosques were destroyed in fresh communal violence in Sri Lanka since Easter Sunday bombings. A night curfew was imposed across the country to prevent the spread of violence. A police official told AFP: "Mobs had attacked him with sharp weapons at his carpentry workshop."

A Muslim man looks on outside the Al-Masjidul Hudha mosque after a mob attack in Kottampitiya, Sri Lanka May 14, 2019. REUTERS/Dinuka Liyanawatte

On Monday, the Sri Lankan government enforced a countrywide curfew and blocked social media platforms to stop people inciting violence as communal violence spread to new areas in the island nation. Police resorted to tear gas at mobs attacking mosques and shops owned by Muslims in various parts of the country. Meanwhile, Sirisena has also prohibited the use of drones in the country till further notice.

"The navigation of any unmanned aircraft or drone in or over the territory of Sri Lanka by any person other than a member of Triforces or police is prohibited until further notice," another Gazette notification said.

Abbraar Masjid mosque is seen after a mob attack in Kiniyama, Sri Lanka May 13, 2019. REUTERS/Dinuka Liyanawatte

The UN has voiced alarm over the spate of communal violence in Sri Lanka since the Easter Sunday bombings and urged the government and religious groups not to tolerate the spread of prejudice and hate, emphasising that "to be a Sri Lankan is to be a Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian."

United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng and UN Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect Karen Smith, in a joint statement on attacks against religious minorities in Sri Lanka, said they are alarmed about the growing acts of violence on the basis of religion, including attacks against homes, places of worship and businesses in the North Western Province of Sri Lanka.

The Special Advisers noted the recent spate of attacks against Muslim and Christian communities in Sri Lanka following the deadly terror attacks carried out on Easter Sunday against churches and hotels in various parts of the country in which nearly 260 people were killed and hundreds injured.

Muslim men gather outside the Abbraar Masjid mosque after a mob attack in Kiniyama, Sri Lanka May 13, 2019. REUTERS/Dinuka Liyanawatte

"Sri Lanka has a pluralistic society. To be a Sri Lankan is to be a Buddhist, to be Hindu, to be a Muslim, to be a Christian. All these communities are entitled to their identity, to freely exercise their religion and to live in peace and security as recognised by the country's Constitution," the Special Advisers said, calling on all Sri Lankans to respect one another.

On April 21, nine suicide bombers, including a woman, carried out a series of devastating blasts that tore through three churches and as many luxury hotels, killing 258 people, including 44 foreigners 10 of them Indians, and injuring over 500 others.

The Islamic State terror group claimed the attacks, but the government blamed local Islamist extremist group National Thowheeth Jamaath (NTJ).

Over 1,000 have been arrested since the attacks. Sri Lanka's police say they have either killed or arrested all those responsible for the bombings.

Sri Lanka has a population of 21 million which is a patchwork of ethnicities and religions, dominated by the Sinhalese Buddhist majority.

Muslims account for 10 per cent of the population and are the second-largest minority after Hindus. Around seven per cent of Sri Lankans are Christians.

Beleaguered Sri Lanka gets long-delayed IMF cash

In a much-needed financial relief for Sri Lanka reeling from the Easter Sunday bombings, the International Monetary Fund today released a long-delayed loan instalment to the Buddhist-majority country.

The IMF is releasing USD 164.1 million under a three-year USD 1.5 billion bailout that was suspended in October during a power struggle between the president and the prime minister.

With the status quo restored, the administration has been able to present a well-targeted 2019 budget, rebuilding reserves, while maintaining a prudent monetary policy, said IMF deputy managing director Mitsuhiro Furusawa.

The power struggle was resolved after the Supreme Court ruled that President Maithripala Sirisena violated the constitution by sacking Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's government.

The loan programme, begun in June 2016, would be extended by a further year, the IMF said. Sri Lanka estimates that it will lose about USD 1.5 million in revenue this year as a result of a sharp dip in tourist arrivals following the April 21 suicide bombings.

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