

Churches remain closed for 2nd week

Catholics participate in televised mass by Archbishop of Colombo amid fears of further attacks

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
NEGOMBO

Father Suranga Warnakulasuriya said prayers alone in his church on Sunday, as Catholic services were suspended across Sri Lanka for the second straight week since the Easter suicide attacks. With the Army staging raids across the country and authorities maintaining high levels of security, the country's 1.25 million Christians are still on edge after jihadist bombers killed 257 people.

Fr. Warnakulasuriya has been saying mass in an empty church in Negombo, just north of the capital, every day since the slaughter at three hotels and three churches, one not far from his. "Sometimes we feel lonely by not being able to celebrate the mass together," admitted Fr. Warnakulasuriya, 32, who only became a priest in 2015.

With churches closed, the country's Catholics had to make do on Sunday with a second televised mass by the Archbishop of Colombo, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith.

A few people went to St. Anthony's Shrine in Colombo to say prayers in front of a barrier set up in front of the church where dozens died on April 21. But the faithful are frustrated.

"It's not enough because we cannot receive the eucharist through television, that's



Hope and prayers: Members of Zion Church, which was bombed on Easter Sunday, praying at a community hall in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, on Sunday. • REUTERS

the important thing," said Shehani Rangana, 33, whose father was among the dead at St. Sebastian's church in Negombo.

Since the bombings, Catholics – shaken by physical and psychological scars from the jihadist attacks – have been organising their own services and solidarity groups. Sometimes, Fr. Warnakulasuriya and other priests say prayers in the homes of parishioners.

Fr. Warnakulasuriya said he goes to up to 20 homes each day to celebrate communion. "They share their views on this attack," he said. "Sometimes they have

hatred feelings, so we try to control them, to persuade them not to have revenge. We try to calm them by saying that Jesus is not hatred but love." Around St. Sebastian's Church, ravaged by a suicide bomber who killed 102 people, nearly all the houses have white flags, the colour of mourning.

The bigger pennants are a sign that someone from the house died in the massacre.

Curfew in Negombo

Later on Sunday, Negombo was placed under curfew by police on Sunday, following clashes between Muslim and Christian mobs. "About two

motorcycles and a three-wheel taxi had been damaged in the clashes," said a senior police officer. "We declared a curfew till 7.00 a.m. to contain the unrest."

Meanwhile, a Minister said on Sunday that Sri Lanka has expelled over 600 foreign nationals, including around 200 Islamic clerics, since the bombings. Home Affairs Minister Vajira Abeywardena said the clerics had entered the country legally, but amid a security crack-down after the attacks were found to have overstayed their visas, for which fines were imposed and they were expelled from the island.

Training camp discovered, say police

REUTERS
KATTANKUDY

Sri Lankan police on Sunday discovered a 10-acre camp in the eastern town of Kattankudy, where Islamist militants linked to the deadly Easter attacks are believed to have practised shooting and bomb-making. The walled terrain is nestled in a poor residential area near the home town of Zahran Hashim, who is believed to have been a key player in plotting the April 21 attacks.

The narrow, sandy plot is dotted with a four-storey watchtower, as well as mango trees, a chicken coop and a goat shed. "They wanted to show this place was normal. If someone comes to see, it looks like a farm. But what they were doing is terrorism," said a senior police officer in the Batticaloa area.

Police found bullet holes in the wall on one side of the grounds, as well as long tubes suspected of holding bombs, the officer said. Two owners of the plot of land have been arrested, the officer said.

Toll in Gaza fighting rises to 8

Israel orders 'massive strikes' against Hamas, Islamic Jihad

REUTERS
GAZA/JERUSALEM

Rockets from Gaza killed three people in an Israeli city while five Palestinian militants died on Sunday in cross-border fighting.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he ordered the military to continue "massive strikes" against Gaza's ruling Hamas group and Islamic Jihad, in the most serious border clashes since a spate of fighting in November.

Israel's military said more than 450 rockets, many intercepted by its Iron Dome anti-missile system, have been fired at southern Israeli cities and villages since Friday, and it attacked some 220 targets belonging to Gaza militant groups.

Rocket hits Israel house

A rocket that hit a house in Ashkelon killed a 58-year-old Israeli man, police said. He was the first such Israeli civilian fatality since the seven-week-long Gaza war in 2014. Separate strikes on the southern Israeli city killed two men, a local hospital official said. In Gaza, at least four Palestinian gunmen were killed in Israeli strikes, health officials said.

In a separate strike it described as a targeted attack, Israel's military killed Hamed Ahmed Al-Khodary, a Hamas commander. The military said he was respon-



Rapid escalation: A Palestinian girl near the remains of a building in Gaza destroyed during an Israeli air strike. • AFP

sible for transferring funds from Iran to armed factions in Gaza. The air strike on his car was the first such killing of a top militant since the war five years ago. Israel had suspended such attacks in a bid to lower tensions.

The sounds of sirens and explosions reverberated on both sides of the frontier, fraying nerves and keeping schools closed.

The latest round of violence began two days ago when an Islamic Jihad sniper fired at Israeli troops, wounding two soldiers, according to the Israeli military. Islamic Jihad accused Israel of delaying implementation of previous understandings brokered by Egypt aimed at ending violence and easing blockaded Gaza's economic hardship.

This time, Israeli strategic affairs analysts said, both Is-

lamic Jihad and Hamas militants appeared to believe that they had some leverage to press for concessions from Israel, where independence day celebrations began on Wednesday.

Israel is also hosting Eurovision Song Contest in Rehovot, southeast of Tel Aviv, in two weeks, and sirens sounded there on Sunday.

In a statement announcing Israel would press on with its attacks, Mr. Netanyahu, who doubles as Defence Minister, also ordered forces around the Gaza Strip to be "stepped up with tanks, artillery and infantry".

For residents in Gaza, the escalation comes a day before the Muslim holy month of Ramzan begins in the territory on Monday. Since Friday, 13 Palestinians, of whom five were civilians, have been killed in Gaza.

Let's do a deal, May tells Corbyn after poll defeat

Both parties lost seats in local elections

REUTERS
LONDON

British Prime Minister Theresa May on Sunday stepped up calls for Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn to agree a cross-party deal to leave the European Union (EU), following poor results for both parties in local elections on Thursday.

"To the leader of the opposition I say this: Let's listen to what the voters said in the local elections and put our differences aside for a moment. Let's do a deal," she wrote in *The Mail on*

Sunday. Labour responded by saying any deal should be done quickly, but accused Ms. May of leaking details of the compromise under discussion.

The Sunday Times reported that the Conservatives would offer new concessions to Labour when talks restart on Tuesday, including a temporary customs union with the EU until a national election due in June 2022. Mr. Corbyn has made a permanent customs union a condition for supporting Ms. May's plans.

Kim oversaw testing of tactical weapons

North Korea on Saturday conducted 'strike drills' in violation of UN resolutions

REUTERS
SEOUL

North Korea has conducted a "strike drill" for multiple launchers, firing tactical guided weapons into the East Sea in a military drill supervised by leader Kim Jong-un on Saturday, the state media reported on Sunday. The purpose of the drill was to test performance of "large-calibre long-range multiple rocket launchers and tactical guided weapons by defence units," the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

Photographs released by KCNA showed the tactical guided weapons fired could



Going ballistic: Short-range weapons being tested in an undisclosed location in North Korea on Saturday. • AFP

be a short-range, ground-to-ground ballistic missiles, according to Kim Dong-yub, a military expert at Korea's Ky-

ungnam University's Institute of Far Eastern Studies.

While such a missile launch would be in violation

of UN Security Council resolutions, it would not involve long-range ballistic missiles that have been seen as a threat to the U.S.

The new, solid fuel ballistic missiles can fly as far as 500 km, putting the entire Korean Peninsula within its range and are capable of neutralising the advanced U.S. anti-missile defence system (THAAD) deployed in South Korea, the military analyst said.

The South Korean Defence Ministry, however, put the range of weapons fired on Saturday at between 70 to 240 km

U.S. to hike tariffs on \$200 bn of Chinese goods

Trade talks moving too slowly: Trump

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump announced on Sunday that the U.S. would raise tariffs on \$200 billion of Chinese goods to 25% this week, because trade talks are moving "too slowly."

Mr. Trump's action came ahead of the arrival of a major Chinese delegation to Washington for the latest round of talks – a round, it is believed, could possibly lead to a deal. "For 10 months, China has been paying Tariffs to the USA of

25% on 50 Billion Dollars of High Tech, and 10% on 200 Billion Dollars of other goods," Mr. Trump tweeted. "The 10% will go up to 25% on Friday," he said. The two sides have imposed tariffs on \$360 billion in two-way trade since last year. But Mr. Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping agreed to a truce in December to refrain from further escalation.

"The Trade Deal with China continues, but too slowly, as they attempt to renegotiate. No!" Mr. Trump complained on Sunday.

ELSEWHERE



Brunei not to punish gay sex with death

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN
Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah on Sunday extended a moratorium on the death penalty for gay sex, seeking to temper a global backlash. The country sparked an outcry when it rolled out its interpretation of Islamic laws, or Sharia, on April 3, punishing sodomy, adultery and rape with death, including by stoning. • REUTERS

1 killed, 5 injured as Russian plane makes emergency landing due to fire

REUTERS
MOSCOW

One person was killed and at least five were injured when a Russian Aeroflot Sukhoi Superjet plane made an emergency landing at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport on Sunday due to fire on board, Russian news agencies said.

TASS news agency, citing a source, said at least one person was killed. Agencies reported various figures on the number of injured – from five to more than 10.

RIA agency said that there were 78 passengers on the plane, which had been headed from Moscow to the



Tail on fire: The Aeroflot which made an emergency at the Sheremetyevo Airport, near Moscow, on Sunday. • REUTERS

northern Russian city of Murmansk. Interfax news agency reported that the tail was completely burned and said a rescue team was trying to find survivors in that part of the plane. The plane,

a one-year-old Sukhoi Superjet, departed from Sheremetyevo for Murmansk but shortly after taking off requested an emergency landing due to fire, according to Russian state media.

4 dead as Taliban targets police headquarters

Suicide bombing followed by attack on police compound in Pul-i-Khumri

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
KABUL

A Taliban suicide bomber and several gunmen attacked a police headquarters in northern Afghanistan on Sunday, killing at least four people and wounding 40 more, according to the insurgents and Afghan officials.

The attack occurred two days after President Ashraf Ghani offered the Taliban a ceasefire during the holy month of Ramzan, which begins on Monday. The insurgents rebuffed the move, which came at the end of peace talks in Kabul, and as the Taliban meets with the U.S. in Qatar.

Sunday's attack started with a massive blast at the police facility in Pul-i-Khum-



Attack on establishment: Afghan special forces arriving at the site of Sunday's attack in Pul-i-Khumri, Baghlan. • REUTERS

ri, about 250 km north of Kabul, sending a huge plume of smoke into the sky.

The explosion was followed up by gunmen storm-

ing the police compound, according to Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid. In a tweet, he said a suicide bomber had detonated

a bomb inside an armoured personnel carrier, "flattening most of the building". Asadullah Shahbaaz, a provincial council member in Baghlan province, said that intermittent fighting was ongoing. Interior Ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi said "two terrorists were gunned down" in the attack, while "the rest of the attackers were besieged by the Afghan forces."

At least four people had been killed and another 40 wounded, Baghlan provincial health director Mohibullah Habib said.

The current round of talks between the Taliban and U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad entered their fourth day on Sunday.