

## Intelligence failures, soft-peddling envelopes deadliest suicide attacks in SL. (2019, April 22). *The Daily Mirror*.

Two men checked into the Shangri-La which now takes pride of place in the heart of the city on April 20, 2019. They had provided an address in Dematagoda when checking in. Close to 9 a.m. yesterday (April 21) the duo detonated two bombs. One at the packed restaurant cum cafeteria on the 3rd floor of the super luxurious hotel, at which many families had come to indulge in a scrumptious Easter Breakfast, and the next on the corridor of the same floor close to the elevators- not too far from each other. The two explosions rocked the Hotel, with the death toll yet unconfirmed.

This was after the twin explosions at two revered Churches, in Kochchikade and Katana were reported.

The first explosion was at the revered church of St Anthony's, just outside the city after which the second at the Katuwapitiya Church.

The bombings at the city hotels took place right after. A few minutes after, a massive explosion was reported from the Zion Church in Batticaloa. Police Spokesperson SP Ruwan Gunasekara failed to give specific times.

"They were all between 8.45 a.m. and 9.05," he said.

"My ears are still reeling" a worker at Shangri La, who spoke to Daily Mirror last evening said.

"We didn't know what happened," he said. Foreigners and locals had gathered to identify bodies scattered on the floor. Many still in shock and disbelief.

"Many are still missing", hotel sources said giving a number of those who are yet to be reported back safe.

Another explosion was also reported from the Kingsbury Hotel. At around the same time, the Taprobane Restaurant at the Cinnamon Grand Restaurant, rife with the same festive delight was rocked by an explosion. All three are located at the heart of the city's establishment.

Sleuths were quick to navigate through the Shangri-la blast.

The suspects were booked to room 616 they told the Daily Mirror. They had recovered two iPhone chargers and other pamphlets and paraphernalia associated with extremist ideology, they said.

They zeroed down on the leads to a building in Dematagoda where they arrested three persons. Three officers were killed as a result of twin explosions around the safe house.

Investigators on the scene said that the Shangri-La blast was a result of at least 25 kilo grams of C-4 explosives. The conclusions are based on initial investigations and await formal confirmation by the Government Analyst.

The Indian media were the first to ascribe blame, giving rise to disbelief initially and speculation thereafter. Top ranking sources informed the Daily Mirror that it was around noon that they uncovered certain identities of the suspects.

However, Indian media was rife with identities of individuals and ideology at least 30 minutes prior. It is uncertain as to how such news was given or gained, with many theories being floated. One is that the Indian Intelligence Agency had warned their Lankan counterparts of the attack.

Sources confirmed that a letter signed by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Priyalal Dasanayake dated April 11 which was widely circulated through social media pertaining to an impending attack, was authentic. The Secretary of Defense and the Establishment did not deny knowledge of the warnings of an attack. The letter

specifies the suspected perpetrators too. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe also confirmed that information “was there”.

Officials sources, however, denied or soft-peddled either willingly or unwillingly the reach of the suspects and their motives. SP Gunasekara at a press conference held at the Ministry of Defense insisted that it was “only locals” but did not identify a group. At a meeting held prior to the press conference, for the heads of Media, the Entire Security Establishment insisted that it was “all local”.

One group, according to them, had been identified and zeroed in on. At the official presser, journalists were told that 3 persons were under arrest whilst at the previously closed door meeting the number given was 7. The final count was Thirteen persons arrested with 10 detained. Gunasekara, when questioned on the letter, said:

“It is still under investigation”. It couldn’t have been lost on him that the “investigation” was a mere phone call away, from the person said to have signed the letter.

Unofficially all sources including those at the top rung said that the suspects were all a part of “one single ideology. They were all a part of a Radical Islamist group” they confirmed together with the identities of the suspects.

The many questions that arise out of the blanket “press story” together with the unofficial titbits were left unanswered.

How did the group form, and why does the State machinery insist that they were acting in isolation? Could they have acted in total isolation? How do normal local Muslims decide to attack another minority group if not any group? What was the ideology and were the perpetrator's mere actors? How far and wide does the ideology seep in within the local community? What did it take to ensure coordinated suicide blasts around Churches and Hotels at the heart of the country? Who was behind the brainwashing of the individuals and where was the training from? The “only local” narrative has to fail, and the questions posed are those of an ordinary civilian. The many other questions which have not been posed must be, and answers must be given, soon.

The local Muslim communities in the Island are in shock and understandably so. The Muslim community was a minority community living on the island with no history of violence. Throughout the millennia of existence, the Muslims were an integral part and parcel of the islands rich heritage and culture. They were ‘Bhoomiputhras’ alongside the other communities.

There was another explosion at Tropical Inn Dehiwala, just beside the National Zoological Gardens at around 1.45 pm killing two. It is unclear as to why or how a motel cum hall was chosen as the target or if the target was missed. The Dematagoda house at which two explosions occurred killing three Crime Divisions officers was the final fatality to a morbid day in Colombo. There were reports of a shoot out in the area too with reports being hazy.

A vehicle was ceased in Ramakrishna Road Wellawatte, suspected to have been used to transport some of the suspects late in the evening. Sources continue to confirm that a safe house in Panadura has been identified, obtained via a prominent online store for rent of Rs. 45,000 a month two months ago.

Information still remains guarded.

“We can’t hamper investigations” we were told. But slowly a picture is being painted. The picture of how the deadliest terror attack was perpetrated and by whom is yet to emerge. Only that the picture must be painted fully and accurately, for the public to decide on what course the Island Nations future should take. (Hafeel Farisz)