

Easter Sunday: An Extensive Chronology of Events

An excerpt from 'Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre: Lessons for the International Community' published by [Penguin](#)

Pre-2015:

26 August 1942 - Jamaat-e-Islami was formed by Abdul A'la Maududi in India. Jamaat-e-Islami's ideology started to influence the neighbourhood including Sri Lanka.

1954 - Sri Lanka Jamaat-e-Islami (SLJI) was founded by Abdul Cader Jailani Shahib in Colombo.

1980 - The SLJI student wing, Sri Lanka Islamic Student Movement (SLISM), was established.

1990 - Mohamed Aliyar founded the Centre for Islamic Guidance (CIG), which began propagating Wahhabism. Aliyar was arrested after the Easter Sunday bombings.

29 May 1996 - Wahhabis launched an attack on the Dhikr Meditation Centre opened by the All Ceylon Thareekathul Mufliheen (ACTM) in Kattankuddy. The leader, M.S.M. Abdullah alias Rah, and other Sufis were targets of shooting, grenade attacks, physical aggression, intimidation, and other threats.

29 May 1998 - M.S.M. Farouk Qadhiree, who was a vocal opponent of Wahhabism, was shot and killed by Wahhabis. A public warning was later issued that the murder was conducted as punishment for those who act against Wahhabism.

29 January 2003 - The Oluvil Declaration was proclaimed, claiming that north-eastern Muslims have an identity and a homeland and therefore claim a separate nation.

2004 - Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed Naufer meets Zahran at Jamayathul Falah Madrasah in Kattankudy, where both are students studying Islam. Naufer influences Zahran on Wahhabism. They play lead roles in the Easter Sunday attack.

31 October 2004 - More than 500 Wahhabis attacked Sufis in Kattankudy. Dhikr Meditation Centre was set ablaze and the library, homes, and businesses were destroyed. A complaint was filed with the police headquarters and a case was filed at the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission (HRC) in 2005. The HRC opined in the Sufis' favour.

2005 - Zahran was expelled from Jamayathul Falah Madrasah for disobedience and extremist ideology. Naufer Moulavi, Ashfar Moulavi, Rauf, Subair, and Zahran then attempted to infiltrate the Islamic Centre established by Abu Bakr Falahi. After failing to do so, they left to create their own Wahhabi organization.

2006 - Daarul Adhar ad Da'iyyah, a Wahhabi organization, was formed in Kattankudy by Zahran and the others. After the Easter Sunday attacks, Daarul Adhar was banned, but their activities continue.

December 2006 - When M.S.M. Abdullah alias Payilvan, leader of the ACTM passed away, Kattankudy witnessed several days of rioting and an indefinite hartal. Many Sufi supporters fled the town after receiving death threats while some who remained in town were forced to renounce Sufi beliefs.

2008 - A Supreme Court order allowed over 200 members of ACTM to return back to their original homes in Kattankudy and exercise their freedom to practice religion. They were obstructed by Wahhabis and armed jihadists.

2009 - Following a dispute with the management of Daarul Adhar, Zahran left the organization with a few others. They planned to establish their own Thowheed Jamaat in Kattankudy.

24 July 2009 - Traditional and local Islam came under threat when Sufis held a *kanduri* feast in honour of a Muslim saint. In Beruwala, the followers of the Sufi Bukhari Thakkiya Mosque and the Thowheed Mahagoda Masjidur Rahman Mosque clashed. Two people were killed, over forty were injured, and at least 132 were arrested by law enforcement authorities.

16 August 2009 - Islamic fundamentalism surged in Kattankudy. Exclusivism advocated by Wahhabis and SLJI, in turn, promoted extremism—the precursor to terrorism.¹

2011 - Kattankudy Thowheed Jamaat was established.

2012 - Mohammed Zuhair Mohammed Aroos travelled to Australia on student visa in 2005. He was deported to Sri Lanka in 2012 for overstaying his visa. While in Australia, he attended the notorious Al-Furqan Mosque in Melbourne, where he met Haroon Moulavi. He also built a relationship with Abdul Latheef Jameel Mohamed alias Jameel, the New Tropical Inn suicide bomber. Eventually, Aroos joined the Islamic State (IS) and influenced Jameel to strike their homeland.

2012 - Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) was established by Venerable Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara.

January 2012 - National Thowheed Jamaat (NTJ) was formed by Zahran in Kattankudy. The NTJ was banned after the Easter Sunday attack.

July 2013 - The European Union parliament in Strasbourg identified Wahhabism as the main source of global terrorism.

¹ Chris Kamalendran, Asif Fuard, and Saman Kariyawasam, 'Unholy Tension In Lanka's Muslim East', *The Sunday Times, Sri Lanka*, August 9, 2019, https://www.sundaytimes.lk/090816/News/nws_23.html.

13 August 2013 - Mohamed Mushin Ishaq Ahamed was the first Sri Lankan to join IS. A humanitarian worker in Africa, he left Tanzania for Syria through Turkey. He was accompanied by his wife and five children.

2014 - At Ishaq's request, his brother Mohamed Muhusin Sarfas Nilam alias Nilam, met with Jameel at All Ceylon Thowheed Jamaat (ACTJ) Mosque at Dematagoda. Nilam proceeded to Syria to join IS.

Meanwhile, an Australian citizen and Qatari University professor, Ahmed Thalib Lukman Thalib, met with SLJI members. Together with his sons Lukman Thalib Ahmed and Lukman Thalib Ismail, he came under the scrutiny after the Easter Sunday attack for facilitating the SLISM national organiser Mohamed Ibrahim Sadiq Abdullah alias Abu Umair to train in Syria.

26 February–22 October 2014 - Sufis of the Alhaj Abdul Jawan Alim Waliullah Trust lodged eleven complaints against Zahran and the NTJ at the Kattankudy police station. NTJ incited hatred and violence against the Sufi community especially its leader Alhaj A. Abdul Rahumman Mispahi Pasji alias Moulavi Rauf.

1 May 2014 - A complaint was made by the Alhaj Abdul Jawan Alim Waliullah Trust to the Eastern Security Forces Commander, Major General Lal Perera, on the grounds that the group was receiving multiple threats from violent Muslim groups, which included Zahran-led NTJ. Major General Perera summoned and warned Zahran to refrain from inciting hatred and violence but the latter continued to do so.

June 2014 - Organized violence was carried out in Aluthgama, Dharga town, Welipenna, and Beruwala.

29 June 2014 - Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, then leader of Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), announced the promulgation of a caliphate. ISIS, or IS, influenced Salafi-Wahhabi groups outside Iraq and Syria to travel to theatre. To build a global caliphate, the self-proclaimed caliph also instructed followers unable to travel to Iraq and Syria to kill non-Muslims in the country or the region where they resided. The IS envisaged controlling territories—including Sri Lanka—by 2020. In its map, Sri Lanka was identified as a part of the Khorasan province.

November 2014 - Under the guidance of Ishaq and his brother Nilam, Jameel travelled to Turkey to enter Syria but failed to do so. He returned to establish an IS support group in Sri Lanka, Jamiyathul Millathu Ibrahim Fi Seylani (JMI), by raising funds, recruiting, and mounting attacks. Through the Sri Lankan contingent in Syria, Jameel also linked IS to Zahran.

Late 2014 - Islamic fundamentalism and religious extremism influenced Sri Lankan Muslims to travel to Syria to join IS.

2015:

January 2015 - JMI was established by Jameel, Umair Mohamed Iqbal, and Mohammed Imad Ibthisam Fakeer to support IS. The latter two were inspired and influenced by Jameel.

Early 2015 - Save the Pearls, a charity caring for homeless children, was infiltrated by Jameel and his recruits Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed Ilham Ahamed and Mohamed Ibrahim Inshaf Ahamed. All three would become Easter Sunday suicide bombers.

9 January - Maithripala Sirisena assumed office as President and Defence Minister, and Ranil Wickramasinghe as Prime Minister. With the Yahapalanaya government consolidating power, national security was no longer a priority.

26 January - Abu Mohamed al-Adani, a chief spokesperson of IS, announced the establishment of Wilayat Khorosan or Khorasan province in South Asia. Hafiz Shahid Khan, a former Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistani commander, was appointed its *wālī* or governor.²

Mid-2015 – Nauffer, who was working for a law firm in Qatar, started propagating Wahhabism at the Islamic Centre in Qatar. He managed the largest Tamil language Wahhabi website. Operating online, Nauffer started to influence Sri Lankan Muslim youth including members of the Jameel-led JMI.

12 July - Nilam was killed in an airstrike in Raqqa, Syria, six months after his arrival there. He was the first of the Sri Lankan contingent to die.³

26 July - Mahendran Pulasthini of Kaluwanchikudy fell in love with Muhammad Hashtoon Achchi Muhammad, a member of the Sri Lanka Thowheed Jamaat (SLTJ). After converting to Islam, she changed her name to Sara Jasmine and married Hashtoon. Hashtoon would mount the Easter Sunday suicide attack on the church in Katuwapitiya. His widow Sara would later kill herself in a mass suicide attack in Sainthamaruthu.

30 July - Zahran issued an open letter to political parties in Kattankudy contesting the 2015 general elections to abide by the conditions set out by NTJ. NTJ pledged to support those who agreed with them, and worked against those who opposed their conditions (e.g. SLMC). After M.L.A.M. Hizbullah was nominated for the national list seat from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), his supporters celebrated and attacked the NTJ mosque where Rilwan would suffer head injuries.

² Abu Muhammad al-'Adnani, 'Say, "Die in Your Rage!"', January 26, 2015, <https://scholarship.tricolib.brynmawr.edu/bitstream/handle/10066/21167/ADN20150126.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

³ Chandani Kirinde, 'Galewela: Shocked residents recall principal turned ISIS member', *The Sunday Times, Sri Lanka*, July 26, 2015, <https://www.sundaytimes.lk/150726/news/Galewela-shocked-residents-recall-principal-turned-isis-member-158512.html>.

22 August - The National Organiser of SLISM, Sadiq Abdul Haq, was removed by SLJI for fear of segregation within the movement. Although he trained with an al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, he embraced the IS ideology.

6 October - The then Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando referred to Zahran by name at the National Security Council (NSC) meeting. Zahran is identified as an extremist by law enforcement authorities and the security and intelligence community.

8 November - Tamil Nadu Thowheed Jamaat (TNTJ) leader P. Jainulabdeen, or P.J., was prevented from entering Sri Lanka. A proponent of Wahhabism, P.J. visited Sri Lanka in 1989, 1992, 1993, 2001, and 2005. P.J. also visited Kattankudy in 2005, strengthening its surging Wahhabi base.

15 December - NTJ was registered as a social service organization with the divisional secretariat in Kattankudy. Formed in January 2012, the influence of NTJ steadfastly grew alongside Zahran's own organization, making him unstoppable.

End 2015 - The IS support group in Sri Lanka, JMI, led by Jameel, expanded. Determined to create an IS Sri Lanka branch, Jameel recruited individuals and co-opted the organization.

2016:

Early 2016 - IS distributed Mohamed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's book, *Kitāb at-Tawhīd*, in Iraq and Syria. IS declared Sri Lanka as part of the caliphate. Zahran promoted these on his Facebook page. Apart from the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID)'s regular surveillance, the Yahapalanaya government did not take action against Zahran despite intelligence reports.⁴ The government also neither proscribed Jamaat-e-Islami nor the Salafi-Wahhabi organizations, which promoted exclusivism and extremism.

29 January - Mohamed Sahid Mohamed Mushin and Nurul Inya Sahabdeen, Ishaq and Nilam's parents, returned to Sri Lanka from Syria.

4 March - Zahran held a programme at Meeraode junction, Valaichchenai under the theme 'The Harm caused to Muslims by the Shia Sect', where he criticised the Shia.

⁴ Select Committee of Parliament to look into and report to Parliament on the Terrorist Attacks that took place in different places in Sri Lanka on 21st April 2019, *Report of the Select Committee of Parliament to look into and report to Parliament on the Terrorist Attacks that took place in different places in Sri Lanka on 21st April 2019*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/comreports/sc-april-attacks-report-en.pdf>.

April 2016 - Zahran told his wife, Hadiya, about his membership in IS. Zahran created a Telegram group called 'Ansar Kilafat' (supporters of the caliphate) with more than 200 members. Hashtoon, who visited the NTJ mosque in Kattankudy, assisted Zahran in managing his social media.

19 May - Sara rejected Hashtoon's attempts to radicalize her and travelled to UAE where her mother was employed. She returned to Hashtoon after four months. With Hashtoon joining NTJ, she followed him and started working with Zahran. They would eventually embrace the IS ideology and become suicide bombers.

24 June - Naufer returned to Sri Lanka, met with Zahran, and gave him a pen drive containing IS videos and documents before returning to Qatar.

July 2016 – The Inspector General of Police (IGP) was informed by the State Intelligence Service (SIS) director that Jameel facilitated Sri Lankans to travel to Syria and Iraq to join IS. With no decisive action taken against Jameel, he continued to build JMI, radicalize Sri Lankan Muslims, and maintain links with the Sri Lankan IS contingent in Syria.

17 July - IS ideology spread within SLJI and SLISM despite the removal of Shahid, Sadiq's brother.

31 July - Naufer met with Hayathu Mohamed Ahamed Milhan in Qatar before returning to Sri Lanka with him. They met with Zahran to lay the groundwork to create an IS Sri Lanka branch.

4 September - To promote the IS, Zahran conducted seminars every Sunday at the NTJ mosque in Kattankudy under the theme 'IS and Caliphate', thus openly advocating for the IS ideology.

14–16 October - A group of JMI members, including Jameel and Ilham, attended fellow member Mohamed Ismail Husni Mubarak's wedding in Kattankudy. There, they met NTJ members, including Zahran, and established rapport.

17 November - At an NSC meeting, the global threat-in-the-making posed by the IS and the radicalization of Muslims in Sri Lanka were discussed. However, no action was taken during or after the meeting.

18 November – In a speech, Sri Lankan Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapaksa highlighted the ongoing radicalization in the local Muslim community. However, Muslim politicians rejected and even condemned the minister's warning.

22 November - The United Thowheed Jamaat wrote a letter to the President disagreeing with Justice Minister's speech on rising Islamist extremism. Others accused him of attempting to drag the country to extremism and incite a bloodbath by igniting racism.

December 2016 - After Jameel was identified as a religious extremist, he was placed under surveillance by the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI). During this time, members of JMI attended training camps conducted by Zahran. However, the government advised DMI not to conduct ground operations.

9 December - Zahran conducted a sermon at the NTJ mosque in Kattankudy on Islam and the caliphate. The video of this sermon was shared on YouTube. To recruit other likeminded IS supporters, Zahran employed social media to identify them, got them to visit the Kattankudy mosque, and discreetly indoctrinated them on IS ideals.

2017:

February 2017 - With the global resurgence of Salafism and Wahhabism, local and traditional Islam was supplanted. Belgium Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis voiced concerns and warnings about Saudi-backed Wahhabism's spread across Europe. Sri Lanka was no exception to the worldwide phenomenon of madrasahs, mosques, and other religious institutions coming under the control of politico-religious ideologies.

2–4 March - Zahran posted letters on his Facebook explaining the concepts of IS and the caliphate and claimed that it was mandatory for Muslims to wage *jihad*.

10 March - An NTJ anti-Sufi meeting turned into a physical altercation between armed NTJ members and Sufis. This resulted in casualties while eight NTJ members and two Sufi members were arrested. Zahran, his family, and other close associates attempted to flee Kattankudy. Other NTJ members such as Niyaz alias Reporter Niyaz continued to spread hate online.

13 March - Sufis protested in Kattankudy calling, for the arrest of Zahran. They handed over a petition at the presidential secretariat and lodged a complaint to Kattankudy police regarding Niyaz's online post. A week after the Easter attack, Niyaz was killed by Sri Lankan security forces.

15–16 March - Following the instigation of violence at the Sufi's public demonstration, then western province governor Azath Salley, on a TV news report, inquired about the reasons for not arresting Zahran.⁵ The NSC, presided over by President Sirisena, reviewed the incident. The issue of Sri Lankan IS advocates was discussed but no action was taken to mitigate the threat.

27–30 March - The Alhaj Abdul Jawan Alim Waliullah Trust prepared a dossier about Zahran and sent it to relevant government and anti-terrorism agencies. Sufi Moulavi K.R.M Sahlan,

⁵ Sandun Jayawardana, 'Authorities were warned of Zahran's ISIS terrorism, claim witnesses', *The Sunday Times, Sri Lanka*, June 16, 2019, <https://www.sundaytimes.lk/190616/news/authorities-were-warned-of-zahrans-isis-terrorism-claim-witnesses-353779.html>.

representing the Sufi sect, along with Sufi-Islamic leaders in Kattankudy, also claimed to have submitted a written complaint against Zahran's violent extremist conduct.⁶ Eventually, TID Director Nalaka Silva's request to investigate NTJ's activities was granted.

17 May - Mohamed Kaleel Mohamed Masfi, an NTJ member accused of giving information to the police about the organization, was shot dead. He was accused on 10 March, assaulted on 26 March and 2 April, and intimidated on 11 April. This was the first assassination ordered by Zahran.

25–26 May - IGP was informed by TID Director Nalaka Silva that they sought the Attorney General's (AG) advice on banning NTJ's online platforms and arresting and investigating those engaged in unlawful activities. Meanwhile, President Sirisena was informed by the SIS that Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara Thero's conduct caused more Muslim youth to move towards the IS ideology.

May 2017 - Abu Haytham alias Millah Seylani's plans to send Muslims to Afghanistan as part of Wilayah Khorasan suffered a setback with the arrest of NTJ members following the 10 March clash.

6 June - The SIS informed President Sirisena of possible attacks against non-Muslims by IS supporters or members. The SIS recommended an increase in security in areas where diplomats and western tourists would gather.

8 June - Members of Jamiyathul Ansaari Sunnathul Mohomadiya (JASM) attacked a cultural centre belonging to Shia Muslims at Meeraode, Valachchenai, injuring three persons and damaging property. IS influence would continue to grow in Sri Lanka.

13 June - International and regional expansion of the IS ideology and Buddhist and Muslim extremist groups operating in Sri Lanka were highlighted at an NSC meeting.

22 June - Deputy Solicitor General (DSG) Dileepa Peiris stated that the IGP failed to precisely monitor NTJ's activities despite being requested to inform the AG's department about the progress of investigations on NTJ's conduct.⁷

July 2017 – The Defence Secretary was instructed to enhance surveillance on radicalized personnel by focusing more on their 'locations' to detect unusual behavioural patterns and movements.

⁶ Select Committee of Parliament, *Report*; Yohan Perera and Ajith Siriwardana, 'We informed Office of Prez, PM and IGP about extremist groups: Sahlan Maulavi', *Daily Mirror*, June 19, 2019, https://www.dailymirror.lk/breaking_news/We-informed-Office-of-Prez--PM-and-IGP-about-extremist-groups:-Sahlan-Maulavi/108-169574.

⁷ Select Committee of Parliament, *Report*.

18 August - Zahran reactivated his Facebook account after he went into hiding. In support of the IS, he began to promote violent activities on his profile. Despite drawing criticism, he persisted in his efforts to radicalize the Muslim community especially the youth.

November 2017 - The government reviewed United Nations Security Council resolution 2253 of 2015 to identify mechanisms to counter IS and al-Qaeda's potential activities in Sri Lanka. However, there was neither progress in raising public awareness about extremism by Muslim leaders nor adequate efforts by government to criminalise these entities. As such, Zahran, now a wanted fugitive, Jameel, and other extremists continued to establish the IS and clandestinely ran training camps and seminars throughout the country.

11 November – At an NSC meeting, Zahran was identified by the SIS director as an extremist preacher motivating Sri Lankan youth towards IS ideology. The rise of IS and the threat to reconciliation was explained to President Sirisena and others in attendance.

13–14 November - Communal violence erupted between a few Muslim and Sinhala groups in the coastal town of Gintota. Three homes were damaged in the attack. The reprisal by the Sinhalese caused dozens of Muslim homes and businesses to be burned and vandalised.

19 November - Exploiting the situation, Zahran uploaded a video onto Facebook to speak in favour of the caliphate, *hijrah* or migration, Sharia law, and jihad.

16 December - Zahran held a seminar at Panda Multi Sports Arena, Malwana to settle a dispute that had arisen within the JMI due to ideological differences.

27 December - Zahran released a video criticising the legislature and judiciary in Sri Lanka. He declared that Muslims who seek assistance from the courts of non-Muslims reject Allah and that Muslim judges and lawyers must be murdered. He called this a great act of jihad.

November–December 2017 - In parallel with the Wahhabis, a segment of Jamaat-e-Islami members joined the IS. Former SLISM leader Sadiq conducted a one-day training in Thoppur where he indoctrinated six trainees and demonstrated assembling and disassembling a T-56.

Late 2017 – The Chief of National Intelligence (CNI), SIS director, and DMI director briefed the Defence Secretary on the possible radicalization of Muslims in Sri Lanka and their future consequences. CNI was instructed to compile a report on the issues, identify counter-mechanisms, and bring the matter to the AG to obtain legal perspective. At the NSC, there was still no policy and decision-making on containing the apparent threat.

2018;

Early 2018 - A deputy IGP from Q branch, the intelligence service of Tamil Nadu police, mounted an operation to infiltrate the IS Sri Lanka branch. Masquerading as an IS leader, undercover officer Abu Hind accessed Zahran through Rilwan.

5 January–4 February - Along with other Thowheed Jamaat factions, Zahran continued to preach and post online videos against democracy and the parliamentary system. He emphasized the importance of jihad. The SIS director recognized Zahran as a threat to harmony in Sri Lanka.

6 February, 12 February - Under his instructions, Zahran and his followers planned to mount attacks. Abdul Majeed Mohamed Farzan, a nominee of the Yahapalanaya-endorsed National Front, was attacked with explosives and his house was damaged. Days later, an election office of the National Front at Marine Drive, Kattankudy was also attacked by bombs.

26 February - Muslim and Sinhalese violence erupted in Ampara in the eastern province after rumors that a Muslim-owned restaurant was serving members of the Sinhalese community tampered food that would affect their fertility. Following this, mobs of Sinhalese Buddhists attacked Muslim citizens, mosques, and other properties. After the government imposed a state of emergency, the military assisted the police in affected areas.

28 February - President Sirisena was informed by intelligence about a Sri Lankan connected to al-Qaeda and who was involved in plans to launch attacks in South Asia. This individual was in contact with Abu Abdullah Al Yemeni in Australia.

5–9 March - Rioting erupted in Teldeniya, later spreading to Digana and other areas after a forty-four-year-old Sinhalese truck driver was violently assaulted by four Muslim youths following a traffic accident, resulting in his eventual death days later. Sinhalese mobs began attacking Muslim properties. Despite organized efforts by groups of Sinhalese youth and Buddhist monks to protect mosques, there were widespread damages and casualties. Police arrested eighty-one persons and noted forty-five incidents of damage to houses, businesses, and four places of worship.

5 March - In an attempt to exploit the communal unrest and recruit Muslim youth, Zahran, now the IS Sri Lanka branch leader, uploaded a video on the incidents. He called for jihad, claiming that Islam could not peacefully co-exist with non-believers, and encouraged Muslims to harm those who fought against them. In response, Jamaat-e-Islami youth in Mawanella, led by Sadiq, and JMI, led by Jameel, united and started to work with Zahran's group.

16 March – IGP was informed by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Nalaka Silva on the steps taken to report Zahran's Facebook account. However, Zahran's social media activity would continue unabated.

23–25 March - Zahran conducted his first training camp after the Digana riots, which incidentally facilitated radicalization and recruitment. Lectures were delivered on IS, evading security, and intelligence monitoring. The Tarbiya session concluded with the demonstration of a T-56. Six of the twenty-five instructors and participants at the camp would eventually participate in the Easter Sunday bombings.

30 March–1 April - Zahran conducted another training camp at the Thashila Holiday Resort with 15–20 participants. Military wing leader Milhan, Hashtoon, and Zahran and Naufer delivered lectures on using firearms, making explosives, and IS, respectively.

2 April - Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud stated in an interview that Saudi Arabia had been spreading Wahhabism at the request of its western allies.⁸

8–16 April - TID summoned Jameel for an investigation on his role in propagating the IS ideology. Days later, the IGP was informed by the TID director about Zahran's disappearance from his wife's home in Kekunagolla, Kurunegala. With the intent of transferring the investigations on Zahran to the SIS, the SIS director informed the IGP to conclude the TID investigation.⁹

May 2018 - The Defence Secretary instructed the SIS director to brief President Sirisena on the threat posed and countermeasures taken to curtail IS. Meanwhile, military wing members Milhan and Rilwan procured chemicals from Pettah. Hashtoon conducted extensive online research to manufacture bombs and built a collection of bomb-making manuals.

4–27 May - Zahran conducted two more training sessions at the Thakshila Holiday Resort with around 30–35 participants. He also continued to post videos on Facebook about the IS' doctrines, including the merits of jihad.

June 2018 - To indoctrinate his Sri Lankan supporters, Zahran's propaganda focused on justifying IS' actions and launching criticisms against peace-loving Muslims. As the IS Sri Lanka branch leader, Zahran also merged both IS and al-Qaeda affiliate members. As an instructor, he co-opted former al-Qaeda-affiliate-trained Sadiq, the former national organiser of SLISM.

8 June - IS Sri Lanka branch assassinated Adam Bawa Mohamed Ismail alias Palani Bawa by shooting him at Aliyar Junction in Kattankudy. While some reported that Palani Bawa was killed for being a police informant, others reported that he was selling marijuana.

17–28 June - Zahran continued to post videos and even released articles to justify the extremist actions of IS and condemn Moulavis who spoke against them.

⁸ Karen DeYoung, 'Saudi prince denies Kushner is "in his pocket"', *The Washington Post*, March 22, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/saudi-prince-denies-kushner-is-in-his-pocket/2018/03/22/701a9c9e-2e22-11e8-8688-e053ba58f1e4_story.html.

⁹ Select Committee of Parliament, *Report*.

July 2018 - In addition to an International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) blue notice, a warrant was obtained by TID for Zahran's arrest.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Zahran continued his online propaganda.

4 July - Zahran shared a letter on his Telegram channel praising Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi for sending his son, Huthaifa al-Badri, who was killed in battle on 2 July, to fight on the battlefields; calling it an example for Muslim leaders. Zahran was inspired to raise his son in the same spirit.

7–22 July - IS expanded its reach to Sri Lanka's deep south. Zahran conducted two separate training camps near Shimila Bakery. Milhan provided theoretical and practical training on firearms and knives while Rilwan provided training on bomb preparations. Zahran and Naufer delivered lectures on IS. Each training was attended by 20–30 recruits.

28 July - Zahran conducted a dedicated training for women to recruit and radicalize their support. Conducted at Palamuna Holiday Inn, the women's programme for wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters was organized with the participation of Zahran, Naufer, and other IS instructors.

10 August - Pakistan authorities shared information with the Sri Lankan High Commission in Islamabad about an IS member's active online planning and preparation of explosives from readily available chemicals. Materials retrieved from the suspect included details of preparing various explosive devices, encryption key instructions, user guides, and weapon training manuals. During this time, Zahran also posted another video supporting jihad, which he believed was part of Islamic religious teachings and was the shortest path to heaven.

15 August - Zahran established a small unit, led by Milhan and comprising Sadiq, Gaffoor Mama, and Sameer, to act as a secret investigation group. The unit's first task was to gather information about police stations in Colombo, the Navy headquarters, and police headquarters. They were also tasked with assassinating two persons who had left Islam.

23 August - In a letter on Facebook, Zahran called for the protection of the caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and hoped al-Baghdadi would receive assistance from Allah to spread Islam by conquering many countries. The letter was published immediately a day after al-Baghdadi called on his supporters and sympathisers to launch attacks against non-Muslims.

26–28 August - Zahran conducted another training camp near Shimila Bakery. There were around 30–40 attendees; the increased number due to Zahran's persistent propaganda. While Zahran, Naufer and Hashtoon were conducting the camp, IS in parallel tested an explosive device in Batticaloa, where Rilwan suffered life threatening injuries. Rilwan was given first aid and then transported to the Colombo National Hospital the next day. He was admitted under the alias 'M.I. Shahid' and under the guise of a gas cylinder blast. Dr H.K. Chandana and nurse Shiromi

¹⁰ Select Committee of Parliament, *Report*.

Vidyasekara noticed inconsistencies in the injuries. However, with Dr Chandana's endorsement, the police were not informed accordingly.

31 August - After Rilwan's accident, NTJ issued a formal letter stating that Zahran and his brother Zaini had been removed to prevent the disruption of NTJ's radicalization plans. Zahran visited NTJ at night and remained connected with its leaders and in contact with its members.

1 September - A raid led by India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) resulted in the arrest of six individuals in the alleged assassination plot against Hindu leaders in Coimbatore.¹¹ The data retrieved during the raid, which included copies of Zahran's speeches and phone records of Zahran contacting IS fighters in Bangladesh and Afghanistan, revealed connections between the Coimbatore cell and Zahran.¹²

15–26 September - Zahran posted a video stating that jihad would be waged in the near future against non-Muslims, which was followed up by an impassioned letter on the same. He also shared IS propaganda through Telegram in the Tamil language under the name 'Ansarul Khilafah'.

October 2018 - To develop hatred and instigate a riot between religious communities, Zahran developed a plan to strike at sacred Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu images. After presiding over a meeting with IS leadership at Abdul Latheef Mohamed Shafee's residence, Zahran instructed Sadiq to be the one to break the statues.

6–7 October - Zahran conducted a training camp at the Blue Eye Inn in Blackpool, Nuwara Eliya. About 20–25 recruits attended.

10–11 October - Zahran posted a letter on his Facebook claiming that a person named Pakkam Bin Abu was an Indian intelligence agent. The next day, Pakkam Bin Abu published on his Facebook that Zahran was an Israeli intelligence agent.

17 October - The US-led campaign to dismantle the IS infrastructure in Iraq and Syria continued. A number of Sri Lankans in Syria continued to be killed. This included Thawzi Thajudeen's wife, Seenathul Arfa Farouk, who was killed in an air strike.

19 October - Committed to causing division, Zahran continued his online campaign of hate, reiterating through social media that Muslims should reject democracy.

¹¹ Press Trust of India, 'NIA files charge sheet against alleged ISIS sympathisers', *Hindustan Times*, February 26, 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/nia-files-charge-sheet-against-alleged-isis-sympathisers/story-4nUJlh12QMwX80oJmlQXP.html>.

¹² Jason Burke and Michael Safi, 'Sri Lanka told of extremist network months before blasts', *The Guardian*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/24/sri-lanka-knew-of-extremist-network-months-before-blasts-sources>.

23 October - At another NSC meeting, Zahran was once again identified as a preacher of IS' extremist ideology. Although details about IS-radicalized Sri Lankans were discussed, no measures, once again, were taken to arrest them or proscribe the IS. Radicalization continued without the implementation of preventive measures or executive action to dismantle the IS Sri Lanka branch and arrest Zahran or his leadership and members.

November 2018 - Sri Lankans who travelled to Syria remained in contact with supporters via social media and received funds through a Punjab National Bank account. To address the financial challenge of relocating Sri Lankan foreign fighters trapped in Syria, Zahran obtained US\$ 23,500 to support them. Meanwhile, the SIS director, who was unaware that the IS Sri Lanka branch had long been established, informed the Defence Secretary that IS supporters in Sri Lanka were working towards establishing an IS and were possibly planning an attack on foreigners and non-Muslims. However, no arrests were made.

3–4 November - The IS stepped up its training by conducting indoctrination sessions both in the hill country and the south. Zahran conducted another training camp near Shimila Bakery with about 25–30 attendees.

13 November – In their meeting, the NSC was briefed that Zahran was motivating Muslims to launch attacks on non-believers. The spread of IS ideology in Sri Lanka and radicalization were also discussed.

16–18 November - The IS carefully selected Jamaat-e-Islami and/or Wahhabi followers to train. Zahran conducted a training camp at the Blue Eye Inn. About 15–20 persons participated in the lectures and training. Zahran maintained a registry of names where he listed those who were committed to fight versus those dedicated enough to commit suicide.

30 November 30 - In an attempt to obtain weapons, two police officers were killed in Vavunativu by an IS operation led by Milhan.

December 2018 - A warning of an attack by Muslim extremists was received by then-Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando. The IGP was informed about taking preventive actions. However, there was neither a national plan by Muslim leaders nor a national strategy by the government. Meanwhile, IS' influence was steadily growing as evidenced by extremist propaganda material recovered by NIA during a raid in Tamil Nadu and SLJI being infiltrated by Sadiq and his brother Shahid in an attempt to radicalize Muslim youth.¹³

¹³ Rahul Tripathi and Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, 'Indian sleuths in Sri Lanka to aid probe into Easter attacks', *The Economic Times*, April 25, 2019, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/69034200.cms?from=mdr&utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.

1–2 December - The IS members at Sippikulama organized another recruitment programme. The programme was identified as Tarbiya or development and training, but in reality, it politicised and radicalized Muslims—especially youth—to be exclusivists, extremists, and terrorists.

Early to mid-December 2018 - The UK-based Wahhabi Razik Mohamed Faiz alias Police Faiz published a message on Facebook that the defence ministry had deployed special intelligence units to investigate Zahran and his followers and that they were currently collecting information. Police Faiz was an active member of the *mujahideen* group in the east during the war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

14–18 December - The IS continued to capitalise on Muslim sorrow and anger after the Digana riots. Sadiq took the lead in recruiting and radicalizing affected Muslim youth to the IS Sri Lanka branch.

23–25 December - IS Sri Lanka branch mounted attacks—led by Sadiq and Shahid—on Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian images in Mawanella to provoke communal clashes. A dozen Jamaat-e-Islami activists turned IS operators were arrested. To legally represent those arrested and absconding, Zahran enlisted both IS financier Ilham’s support and Naufer to approach families in need of legal assistance.

28 December - ASP Kamal Perera, personal assistant to the SP division in Kegalle, was designated as the investigation officer-in-charge (OIC) for the religious vandalism case. ASP Perera requested information from relevant agencies including INTERPOL regarding the perpetrating group’s possible international connections.

Late 2018 - With the SIM cards and identity cards fraudulently obtained by Rilwan, the IS prepared to build a secure communication system to mount a series of attacks in 2019. These preparations would continue until the commencement of said attacks.

2019;

3 January - Western province governor Azath Salley met with pertinent government officials after realising the danger of a communal conflagration following the religious vandalism case in Mawanella. Sufi Muslim leaders who realised the looming threat pledged support to find the perpetrators. In addition to the Public Development Minister, Governor Salley called the IGP and Defence Secretary to hand over evidence.¹⁴ Previously, Governor Salley contacted the president of All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), Rizwi Mufthi, and head of the Muslim Council, N.M.

¹⁴ Chandani Kirinde, ‘Warnings about growing extremism went unheeded, Salley and ACJU rep. tell PSC’, *Daily Financial Times*, June 12, 2019, <https://www.ft.lk/front-page/Warnings-about-growing-extremism-went-unheeded--Salley-and-ACJU-rep--tell-PSC/44-679836>.

Ameen, immediately after the Mawanella incident to discuss the matter. Rizwi assigned Mohamed Salley Mohamed Thassim, also known as Thassim Moulavi, Assistant Secretary of ACJU and Seylan Muslim Youth Organization director, to assist.

6 January - President Sirisena was informed by the SIS director about the suspects behind the Mawanella incident, their extremist ideologies, and close connections with Zahran.

14 January - Sadiq and Shaïd were properly identified as suspects in the Mawanella incident and their connection with Zahran was presented at the NSC meeting. However, once again, neither swift action was taken to dismantle the IS network nor specialist resources diverted to arrest the perpetrators.

16 January – Following their investigations, law enforcement officers discovered land at Wanathawilluwa in the Puttalam district where large amounts of weapons and explosives were stored. After the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) received information that Sadiq and Shahid were in Puttalam, those who managed the facility were questioned and it was revealed that Zahran and his followers conducted trainings there. Officers attached to the SIS, DMI, and other intelligence services visited the site.

22–25 January - Jamaat-e-Islami Central Committee member Rasheed Mohamed Ibrahim, father of Sadiq and Shahid, was arrested and produced in court on 25 January. He was an ideologue of IS and served as an instructor during Zahran’s training camps. A search of his home led to the discovery of over 390 CDs, an air rifle, documents, and a recording studio, which was used to produce propaganda videos.

23 January - Zahran’s name was revealed in connection with the discovery of the explosives and weapons in Wanathawilluwa. In response to the risk of capture or kill, Zahran expedited his plans for mounting a suicide attack.

29 January – CID Director SPP Shani Abeysekara turned down ASP Kamal Perera’s 28 December request to enlist INTERPOL assistance to investigate the international dimension of Mawanella incident, claiming there was no information to back such a possibility. Meanwhile, the monthly threat forecast prepared by the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka recommended that the group involved in the Wanathawilluwa discovery should be investigated for international connections.

31 January–6 March - To sustain his online propaganda campaign, Zahran continued to use his Facebook account to propagate hatred towards non-Muslims., with content demonstrating that Zahran was planning to kill and die in the name of jihad.

2 February - At the NSC meeting, the SIS director discussed the Wanathawilluwa recovery and its connection with Zahran.

8 February - The investigative plan on the Mawanella incident was sent to CID Director SSP Shani Abeyssekara. It recommended that the investigation explore the possibility of international assistance behind the group.

19 February - In the penultimate NSC meeting held before the Easter attack, the Wanathawilluwa incident was mentioned but not discussed at length.¹⁵

Early to mid-March 2019 - CID officers failed to arrest Army Mohideen and Rilwan despite being notified of their hiding place by SIS operatives.

6 March - Youth in Batticaloa, Ampara, and Trincomalee were motivated by Rilwan to launch IS style attacks in Sri Lanka.

8 March - Milhan shot Thasleem, coordinating secretary to minister Kabir Hashim, in the early morning while he was at home asleep. He miraculously survived the attack but would remain bedridden and partially paralysed. Thasleem was the interpreter attached to the CID team that raided the IS facility at Wanathawilluwa.

15 March - Brenton Harrison Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian and far-right terrorist, killed fifty-one and injured forty Muslim worshippers in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. This attack, along with the losses in Baghouz and the continued government hunt for Zahran, prompted the IS Sri Lanka branch to accelerate their attack plans, with Zahran deciding to strike on Easter Sunday.

18 March - With the discord between Zahran and his deputy leader Naufer growing, the IS Sri Lanka branch split, which disrupted their plans.

19 March - In the aftermath of the Christchurch massacre, IS spokesperson Abu Hassan al-Muhajir released an audio recording after six months of silence calling for retaliatory attacks.

23 March - IS lost its base on the eastern village of Baghouz in Syria, which was considered IS' final stronghold.

24 March - Zahran's brother Zaini did not respond to his summons at the CID headquarters in Colombo.

25 March - With the split in the IS Sri Lanka branch, the rivalry between Naufer and Zahran prompted the factions to co-opt followers of NTJ, Jamaat-e-Islami, and JMI.

26 March - The deputy director of the SIS' Q division, which overlooked Muslim extremism, sent an internal memo that Sadiq, Shahid, and Zahran led the Mawanella attacks. The first two had been

¹⁵ Select Committee of Parliament, *Report*.

hiding in Wanathawilluwa between late December to early January, manufacturing explosives and launching an IS-style attack in Sri Lanka. SIS determined it imperative to arrest them.

27 March – During a meeting with his group, Zahran announced that he would participate in their attack plans as a suicide bomber. In the same session, Zahran, Hashtoon, Jameel, and Muaath invited Sameer to join them.

31 March - At the NSC, the SIS director shared information on the Christchurch incident in New Zealand.

April 2019 - Riyas Abu Bakr and Abu Dujana were arrested during a raid conducted by NIA in multiple districts within Kerala state and were alleged of maintaining links with Zahran. Abu Bakr reportedly travelled to Afghanistan in 2016 to meet IS militants and had planned an attack in India. A strong network between Indians from south Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and Islamic extremists in Sri Lanka was also identified.¹⁶

1 April - In preparation to mount a suicide attack, Ilham and Inshaf transferred their shares in Ishan Spice Company to their younger brother, Mohamed Ibrahim Ismail Ahamed, through a deed of gift. The would-be suicide bombers approached their wives to also convince them to commit suicide (along with their children). While Ilham managed to convince his wife, Inshaf failed to do so.

4 April - SIS Director Nilantha Jayawardena was informed by an Indian intelligence officer about an impending attack by Zahran and his group. This included information on targets, methods of attack, and group members. The message was forwarded to pertinent officers in the Q division. A team was then sent by the SIS director to the eastern province to investigate the matter.

5 April - India's Research and Analysis Wing representative confirmed the information received by the SIS director from the Indian Intelligence Bureau on 4 April. The Q division's deputy director sent a report to the SIS director that Zahran, Rilwan, and Shahid had been identified as hiding in Oluvil, Akkaraipattu. Rilwan continued to visit his family in Arayampathy while in hiding.

7 April – A letter was sent by the SIS director to CNI, which included a copy of the intelligence received by the Indian Intelligence Bureau representative. The subject of the letter was 'information of an alleged plan of attack'. Meanwhile, an Indian delegation led by then Indian Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra visited Sri Lanka to attend the Indo-Sri Lanka defence dialogue. He stayed at Taj Samudra, a five-star hotel that was selected for attack by the IS.

¹⁶ Nafisa Hoodbhoy, 'India Makes it Easier to Charge Citizens With Alleged Ties to IS', *Voice of America*, August 8, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/extremism-watch-india-makes-it-easier-charge-citizens-alleged-ties/6173455.html>.

8 April – Then CNI Director Sisira Mendis discussed the contents of SIS’ letter with then Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando before moving to discuss the matter at the intelligence coordinating meeting scheduled on April 9. At the same time, the investigation team returned from eastern province and reported to the SIS director.

9 April - Two out of the four suspects found in Wanathawilluwa in January were released by order of President Sirisena in his capacity as Defence Minister. When questioned during the investigations after the Easter attack, President Sirisena maintained that the officers who submitted that document for his signature must take responsibility for it.

9–10 April – Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando, SIS Director Nilantha Jayawardena, and CNI Director Sisira Mendis agreed that the Indian intelligence received was not discussed in the intelligence coordinating meeting. The report by the investigation team identified several IS members and the planned suicide terrorist attack in Sri Lanka targeting important churches. This information was shared by the SIS director to IGP and other pertinent officials and was noted by the TID director for action. However, this was not forwarded to the Presidential Security Division (PSD).¹⁷

10 April - The threat assessment report sent to the DIG by the SIS director mentioned there were no threats—in the form of terrorists, extremists, or other groups—to President Sirisena’s Batticaloa tour due on 12 April. Although he failed to mention the information from the Indian Intelligence Bureau received on 4 April, the SIS director did make reference to Zahran’s Facebook uploads, which talked about the destruction of non-Islamic followers or *kafirs* for the protection of Islam.

During this time, Senior Deputy Inspector General (SDIG) M.R. Latheef, commandant of the Special Task Force (STF), spoke over the phone with two officials of the Indian High Commission—namely Intelligence Bureau DIG Santhosh Varma and OIC of Security Col. Ravindran—and discussed security arrangements for the Indian High Commission and India House in response to the 9 April letter by Indian authorities warning of an attack.

12–16 April - President Sirisena toured Batticaloa before proceeding to India, and thereafter to Singapore with the intention of returning to Sri Lanka on 21 April.

16 April - In preparation for the Easter Sunday attack, the IS conducted a dry run where the master bomb maker, Hashtoon, tested an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) on a scooter in Kattankudy.

17 April - The SIS director was notified of the 16 April motorcycle blast. Meanwhile, Inshaf, who was assigned to strike Cinnamon Grand, booked rooms at the Kingsbury and Shangri-La hotels in Colombo for the bombers to stay the night before the attack. To pay their families, he also obtained

¹⁷ Bentota Unnanse, ‘Easter Sunday bombings and spy agencies in Sri Lanka – Part II’, *Daily Financial Times*, June 22, 2019, <https://www.ft.lk/opinion/Easter-Sunday-bombings-and-spy-agencies-in-Sri-Lanka-%E2%80%93-Part-II/14-680496>.

Rs. 34 million from his company, Colossus (Pvt.) Ltd, through his firm's accountant. All assigned bombers also cased their targeted hotels.

18 April - The PSD DIG discussed security matters related to President Sirisena with SIS. No mention was made of the 4 April threat information, but the delegation was informed of NTJ's recent extremist statements and murderous intent. Meanwhile, the SIS director informed pertinent officials and government agencies about the progress of investigation on the 16 April motorcycle blast, including the involvement of Zahran and his associates as well as the danger posed by NTJ and its members. However, local police at the location where the blast took place were unaware of the intelligence report's content, which noted that IS was preparing to mount an attack.¹⁸

19 April - Zahran and his chief financier Ilham visited and mounted surveillance on the Shangri-La Hotel.

20 April - While the IS was preparing their attack, both Indian and Sri Lankan security and intelligence services tried to get law enforcement authorities to pre-empt the attack or neutralise the threat. However, neither the military nor the STF was deployed. Instructions to strengthen the security around churches, increase road barriers, conduct raids, and alert necessary teams were neither executed nor followed up on too.

All the suicide bombers—except for the sole female, Fathima Jiffry—gathered at Span Towers in Mount Lavinia, which was rented by IS operator 'Reporter Niyaz'. While Zahran delivered the farewell pledge, the bombers renewed their pledge of allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Hashtoon recorded the proceedings.

After this, suicide bombers began checking into the hotels: Mohamed Assam Mohamed Mubarak alias Mubarak at Kingsbury Hotel, Zahran and Ilham at Shangri-La Hotel, Inshaf, under the name Mohamed Assam Mohamed Mubarak, at the Cinnamon Grand Hotel, and Jameel at the Taj Samudra Hotel. Hashtoon travelled to Negombo and occupied the IS safehouse at Katuwapitiya while Asad traveled to Batticaloa through the night.

21 April - Information was received by the SIS director from the Indian Intelligence Bureau representative that attacks would be carried out between 6 a.m. and 10 a.m. that day. A Methodist Church in Colombo was mentioned as a target of an operation. These details were passed on to the western province's SDIG, the Defence Secretary, and the IGP.

¹⁸ Chandani Kirinde, 'EP Senior DIG in the dark about NTJ activity intelligence reports', *Daily Financial Times*, July 11, 2019, <https://www.ft.lk/news/EP-Senior-DIG-in-the-dark-about-NTJ-activity-intelligence-reports/56-681767>.

Mubarak detonated his bomb at the Kingsbury Hotel's Harbor Court restaurant at 8.47 a.m. where nine died (including eight foreigners) and twenty-three were maimed and injured (including seven foreigners).

Zahran detonated his bomb at the Shangri-La Hotel's Table One restaurant on the third floor at 8.54 a.m. Ilham detonated his bomb by the lift lobby of the third floor—killing, maiming, and injuring those fleeing the restaurant. The blast resulted in the death of thirty-three persons (including twenty-two foreigners) and injured thirty-four persons (including twelve foreigners).

Inshaf detonated his bomb at the Cinnamon Grand Hotel's Taprobane restaurant at 8.50 a.m. Twenty-one died (including twelve foreigners) and twenty were maimed and injured (including nine foreigners).

Hashtoon detonated his bomb at St Sebastian's Church at 8.47 a.m., resulting in 115 deaths and 302 casualties.

Alawdeen Ahamed Muaath detonated his bomb at St Anthony's Church at 8.45.a.m. where fifty-seven died and 145 were maimed and injured.

Mohamed Nazar Mohamed Azath detonated the bomb at Zion Church at 9.02 a.m. This resulted in thirty-one deaths (majority children) and sixty-seven casualties.

Jameel attempted to set off a bomb at Taj Samudra Hotel at 8.51.a.m. but failed. He left the hotel when he was not successful and checked into the New Tropical Inn, where the blast occurred at 1.20 p.m., resulting in two deaths and one injured. He left the hotel when he was not successful.

Multiple explosions occurred at Mahawila Gardens, which was Inshf and Ilham's parental residence. Two explosions occurred at 2:25 p.m. and 2:27 p.m. in Ilham's bedroom, resulting in the deaths of three officers, Ilham's wife Fathima Jiffry, who was pregnant, and their children, and injuring one.

22 April - Then President Sirisena appointed a Presidential Committee, which was headed by Justice Vijith Malalgoda, to investigate the bombings.¹⁹ At the same time, the booby-trapped van at St Anthony's Church, which Muaath had arrived in, was brought to SDIG Latheef's attention. After evacuating the surrounding areas, the STF conducted a controlled detonation.

23 April - IS claimed responsibility for the attacks through three written statements and a fifty-nine second video.

¹⁹ Centre for Society and Religion, 'Commission Report Summary', *Easter Attack Info*, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://easterattack.info/commission-report-summery/>.

24 April - While investigations on the bombings were underway, police discovered a paint-firm-turned- safehouse in Sarikkamulla suburb south of Colombo, where 240 empty packets of quarter inch steel balls, mobile phones, and different vehicle licence plates were recovered. Riyaz Mohammad, distribution manager at the paint firm, confirmed that Hashtoon stayed at the safehouse and regularly drove the rest of the group around.²⁰

25 April - Detonators wrapped in a parcel were discovered in Nuwara Eliya near Kandy. Meanwhile, President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickramasinghe received major backlash from the public, who wanted security forces to act against IS operatives and supporters. Security forces took the lead and informed President Sirisena that around seventy out of 130–140 IS suspects were arrested. The intelligence community—particularly the SIS and DMI—provided lists of IS operators and supporters to the CID and CTID for arrest. Hitherto, the NSC was still reluctant to respond to threats on Muslim extremism while the military and intelligence supported the police dismantling JMI. Hemasiri Fernando also ceased his office as Defence Secretary.

26 April - In Sainthamaruthu, Zahran's family and widows of two suicide bombers committed mass suicide. The explosion also killed Zahran's son, parents, two brothers, their spouses and children, one sister, her husband, and their children. Zahran's widow Hadiya and their daughter survived the explosion and were rescued by security forces.

27 April - President Sirisena banned NTJ and the splinter radical group JMI following the Easter Sunday bombings.

29 April - In an eighteen minute video and audio clip released via the IS Telegram channels, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made his first video appearance since the height of IS power in July 2014.²¹ He congratulated the group on the attacks while gloating that 'Americans and Europeans' were among the casualties. He portrayed the attacks as vengeance, particularly for their brothers in Baghouz. The audio further mentions the global presence of IS; naming affiliates in Sri Lanka, Mali, Bukina Faso, Turkey, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Khorasan, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia. He also told fighters to prepare for a long war and to fight a war of attrition to drain the enemy's capabilities.²²

Meanwhile, President Sirisena appointed former army commander Gen. S.H.S Kottegoda as the new Defence Secretary and DIG C.D. Wickramaratne as Acting IGP. President Sirisena consulted former defence secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa in appointing Gen. Kottegoda. On the other hand, after IGP Pujith Jayasundara refused to resign, President Sirisena sent him on compulsory

²⁰ Robert Mendick, Bill Gardner, and Ben Farmer, 'Revealed: Student days of Sri Lanka bomb plotter at UK university', *The Telegraph*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/04/24/abdul-lathief-jameel-mohamed-sri-lanka-suicide-bomber/>.

²¹ 'Isis chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi appears in first video', *BBC*, July 5, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28177848>.

²² Mina al-Lami, 'Analysis: What al-Baghdadi's appearance tells us about Islamic State plans', *BBC Monitoring*, April 30, 2019, <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200s8zz>.

retirement amid growing public outrage over the government's failure to act on intelligence reports regarding the attacks.

1 May - Weapons were discovered in the east coast of Eravur.

5 May – Violence erupted between Negombo’s Christians and Muslims. Mob attacks were carried out on Muslim shops and residences despite curfew being imposed. The intense anger against Muslims was diffused by the Archbishop of Sri Lanka Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, who vehemently condemned the attacks and simultaneously called for peace and calm, making a distinction between ‘brothers’ in the Muslim community and the attackers.

12 May - Sporadic violence erupted along the Catholic belt despite the declaration of emergency, deployment of security forces, and the Cardinal’s call for calm. In Chilaw, riots erupted between Catholics and Muslims after Sinhalese and Tamil mobs called to boycott Muslims shops. Muslim face coverings associated with foreign influences were banned under emergency laws that also empowered police and military to arrest people without warrants and detain them for long periods.

13 May - Anti-Muslim riots broke out in two provinces with Sinhala and Tamil mobs on a rampage. Muslim properties were attacked in various localities within Kurunegala district as well as Minuwangoda town in Gampaha district. The erosion of public trust amplified when the public found out that all 225 parliamentarians were informed of the pending attack. The angry public wanted them, along with President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickramasinghe, to step down for failing in their duty to protect the citizens and foreign guests.

14 May - Members of Parliament presented a proposal to the Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security (SOCNS) on the manner in which the Easter Sunday attack occurred, the need for immediate changes in the existing core legal framework to remedy the problematic and chaotic situation that built up, and to prevent jeopardizing the country’s national security even further. After convening with both members and non-members, Committee Chairman Malith Jayathilake met with ministries, departments, and other state and non-state institutions. He concluded that national security should prevail above all other priorities.²³

22 May–20 September - The Sri Lankan Parliament, through a resolution, appointed a Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) mandated with investigating the circumstances surrounding or connected to the Easter attacks, dissemination of information between pertinent agencies, whether adequate measures were taken to prevent and/or mitigate the attacks, whether there were deficiencies in state machinery or any other factors that contributed to the attacks,

²³ Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security, *Report of the Proposals for Formulation and Implementation of relevant laws required to ensure National security that will eliminate New Terrorism and extremism by strengthening friendship among Races and Religions*, February 19, 2020, <https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/comreports/1582610584075624.pdf>.

validity of allegations levelled against any member of parliament, governors, or any other persons, and what action should be taken to prevent such attacks in the future. In addition to summoning board members to testify before the PSC, the report of the board was also handed over to the PSC chairman. The PSC questioned the Special Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) too. PSC's final sitting was on 20 September.²⁴

23 May - BBS General Secretary Galagodaththe Gnanasara Thero received presidential pardon and was released from Welikada prison. Notorious for his provocative rhetoric against Muslims, he was arrested on contempt of court charges in August 2018 and had received a six-year term, to be served concurrently.

31 May - After paying homage to the Temple of the Tooth Relic, Athuraliye Rathana Thero held a 'death fast' to demand the removal of Industries Minister Rishad Badurdeen and eastern and western provincial governors M.L.A.M. Hizbullah and Azath Salley, both of whom were under the National Unity Alliance. Echoing demands similar to the hunger strike by Opposition lawmaker Ratana, Gnanasara Thero joined him in stating that he would launch a national protest unless Muslim leaders were sacked by noon on Monday, 3 June.

3 June - Nine Muslim ministers, deputy ministers, and state ministers resigned. Of the nineteen Muslims in the 225-member Parliament, eleven held cabinet, state, deputy ministerial, and governor positions. While retaining their parliamentary seats, Muslim lawmakers all resigned from their portfolios for a month to pave way for investigating the allegations that some supported the Easter attackers. It was the first time since independence in 1948 that the government had no Muslim representatives. After a month, they rejoined the government and investigations revealed that none of them were involved in the attacks.

10 June - Justice Vijith Malalgoda, who led the Special Board of Inquiry (SBI) Appointed to Inquiry into the Series of Incidents Related to the Explosions that Occurred at Several Places in the Island on 21 April 2019 with former IGP N.K. Ilangakoon and former secretary of the law and order ministry Padmasiri Jayamanne, submitted their report on the bombings.

Late June 2019 - A stash of arms and explosives were recovered by Sri Lankan police in Kattankudy. Among those recovered were some 300 gelignite sticks, 1,000 detonators, and nearly 500 T-56 live ammunitions. The search operation was based on information from Mohamed Milhan, one of five suspects deported from Saudi Arabia earlier in June.

11 July - Multiple searches were carried out by NIA at seven locations in Tamil Nadu over a suspected link between an IS cell in Coimbatore and Sri Lanka. With the IS ideology spreading and crystalizing, IS cells, networks and groups emerged. This led to the arrest of thirty-two-year-old Mohamed Azarudeen, owner of a tour and travel company in Coimbatore. Azarudeen was

²⁴ Select Committee of Parliament, *Report*.

Facebook friends with Zahran and had also been sharing radical content attributed to Zahran over social media. He also ran a Facebook page 'KhilafahGFX', which had IS propaganda.²⁵

25 August - SLJI leader Rasheed Hajjul Akbar was arrested and detained by the Colombo Crime Division (CCD).

22 September - As a more comprehensive investigation was needed, President Sirisena appointed a PCoI to further investigate and inquire into the Easter Sunday attacks. Apart from a host of mandates that included receiving public complaints, information, and other materials against public servants/officers, organizations/institutions, or any other persons alleged to have direct or indirect connections to the bombings, the PCoI was also mandated to identify acts that should be forwarded to pertinent law enforcement authorities or statutory bodies for the conduct or necessary investigations/inquiries or proceedings, and make recommendations to rehabilitate or assist aggrieved parties, ensure the safety of the public, prevent the recurrence of such incidents as well as possible damage to national security and nation unity by such acts of terrorism and extremism.²⁶

18 November - President Sirisena stepped down as president and defence minister. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the former defence secretary who ended the fight against LTTE, campaigned on a national security vote and, with a two thirds majority, was appointed the eighth Executive President of Sri Lanka.

21 November - Prime Minister Wickremasinghe stepped down from office. He was succeeded by Mahinda Rajapaksa, a former president of Sri Lanka.

2020:

February 2020 - A counterterrorism operation in Russia dismantled a Tablighi Jamaat terrorist cell. Seven suspects, both Russian and Central Asian, were arrested. Meanwhile, on 19 February, President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa advised the NSC to implement the recommendations laid out in the previous government's 'Report of the Proposals for Formulation and Implementation of Relevant Laws Required to Ensure National Security that will Eliminate New Terrorism and Extremism by Strengthening Friendship Among Races and Religions'.²⁷

12 March–13 May - The PCoI's work was paused due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

²⁵ Kamaljit Kaur Sandhu, 'Islamic State link: NIA arrests TN man who befriended Sri Lanka bomber on Facebook in Coimbatore raids', *India Today*, June 13, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/islamic-state-link-nia-arrests-tn-man-who-friended-sri-lanka-bomber-on-facebook-in-coimbatore-raids-1547696-2019-06-12>.

²⁶ The Presidential Commission of Inquiry to Investigate and Inquire into and Report or Take Necessary Action on the Bomb Attacks on 21 April 2019, confidential government report, January 31, 2021.

²⁷ Sectoral Oversight Committee, *Report*.

2 June–17 July – A committee of officers was appointed by the AG to hold a preliminary investigation to find facts on the delay in tendering advice on the EER/08/2017 file pertaining to Zahran. Their findings recommended that DSG Azad Navavi and State Counsel Azeez should be dealt with disciplinary action under the Establishments Code.

15 August - PCoI visited St Anthony's Church and St Sebastian's Church—two of the sites that were bombed during the Easter attacks.

27 October–12 November - Work of PCoI paused due to mandatory quarantine after an officer attached to the investigating unit contracted COVID-19.

October 2020 - Ahmed Thalib Lukman Thalib and his son Ismail were arrested by the Qatar government for aiding and abetting terrorism.

2021 – 2022:

16 March 2021 - IS spokesperson, Abu Hasan Muhajir, called for attacks worldwide in retaliation to the US-led coalition campaign in Syria against IS.

17 October 2021 - During a special webinar organized by the Australia-Sri Lanka Forum for Justice for the Easter Sunday Victims, Archbishop Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith stated that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa informed him that acting on all the recommendations of the Easter Sunday commission would cost him his popularity.

15 December 2021 - At a press conference organized by the presidential media division, Gen. Kamal Gunaratna, Defence Secretary, denied allegations made against President Gotabaya Rajapaksa that accused him of being the 'mastermind' of the Easter Sunday bombings.

4 February 2022 - Claiming there was no justice for Easter attack victims, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith boycotted the seventy-fourth Independence Day celebration and called for regime change.²⁸

21 April 2022 - Marking the third year remembrance of the Easter Sunday attack, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith condemned the bombings as a plot backed by military intelligence officials for Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ascendance to power. He also declared that Zahran and his band of attackers were known to be in the pay of the military intelligence.

14 July 2022 - President Gotabaya Rajapaksa resigned following waves of protests that prompted him to flee from Sri Lanka. Protesters attacked his house and the presidential

²⁸ Amani Nilar, 'Cardinal to boycott Independence Day celebrations', *Newsfirst Sri Lanka*, February 3, 2022, <https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/02/03/cardinal-to-boycott-independence-day-celebrations/>.

secretariat and burnt the private residence of Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. The protests, driven by the fuel shortages, power cuts, and lack of essential commodities, was a result of the economic crisis precipitated by the Easter attack, COVID-19 pandemic, corruption, and financial mismanagement. The Opposition, both mainstream and fringe, took the opportunity to destabilise the constitutionally elected government. The Catholic church, Muslim groups and Tamil separatists played a frontline role in participating and supporting the protests.

24 July 2022 - The new President Ranil Wickramasinghe made an official request to the UK government seeking assistance from UK law enforcement authorities to investigate the Easter Sunday attack.

31 July 2022 - At the festive mass held to mark the annual feast of St. James Church in Mutuwal, Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith claims that the truth behind the Easter Sunday attacks has been swept under the rug as powerful people in the country were behind them. He further claimed that those who were instrumental in setting off the bombs are still engaged in politics and work as police officers to date.

20 December 2022 - Voice of Khurasan, the official magazine of IS' south Asia province, featured Zahran as 'the Amir of the Istishhadi knights', or prince of the martyrdom knights, and hailed IS' Easter Sunday attack.

12 January 2023 - Sri Lanka's Supreme Court ordered former president Maithripala Sirisena to pay Rs. 100 million (US\$ 850,000) from personal funds to the victims' fund. Ruling on a petition filed by the families of the victims as well as church leaders and activists, Sirisena and four officials were ordered to pay compensation for failing to prevent the attacks.