

More Tamil mass graves found in Sri Lanka

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A second mass grave has been found close to a stadium in Jaffna, the capital of Sri Lanka's Northern Province, the center of the island's Tamil minority population. Three excavations were done on the spot on April 7, uncovering 8 skeletons in the first, 16 in the second and 25 in the third. It is suspected that these skeletons were those of the Tamils killed and buried en masse during the Indian Army's occupation of the Northern and Eastern provinces in 1987.

This new mass grave was found accidentally by municipal workers when they were cleaning old toilet pits in Duraiappa Stadium. Two skeletons are believed to be those of small children. One was that of a teenage boy and another was that of a young girl. These excavations were done in the presence of a Jaffna district judge and a Judicial Medical Officer (JMO). After the JMO demanded proper excavations, suspecting more skeleton remains, the next digging was fixed for May 15, with forensic and soil experts ordered to be present, in addition to a government analyst.

More than 100,000 Indian soldiers were sent to the north and east of Sri Lanka in 1987, under the Indo-Lanka Agreement, to crush the struggle of Tamils for democratic rights and to suppress them. The agreement was signed by then-President Jayawardena of Sri Lanka and the late Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, with the backing of V. Prabakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Tamil nationalist guerrilla group, and with the blessings of American imperialism.

The agreement had clear political objectives: to unleash the Indian army against the rebellious Tamils in the north and east and to allow the Sri Lankan government to turn its armies and police to the South to station them against the masses there, especially against rural youth, whose resentment towards the capitalist regime in Colombo was growing. When the LTTE belatedly turned against the agreement, the Indian

Army went all out to crush it and to suppress the masses. Indian troops killed nearly 20,000 people, most of them innocent civilians.

The People's Alliance government, whose military forces now control Jaffna, did not initiate the excavation of the Duraiappa Stadium mass graves. It came about through a judicial process. The PA government has yet to open another mass grave discovered at Chemmani, also near Jaffna, where the victims were apparently killed by the Sri Lankan army.

The Chemmani grave came to light last July 5, when a former army corporal told a high court judge that he knew about a mass grave where about 400 bodies of Tamils were buried. He said that the bodies of those killed by the army were brought to Chemmani, along with people who were to be executed and then buried there.

These killings and burials were done at the direction of military commanders. "If the orders of the higher officials were not carried out, the soldiers would be punished," he said. The corporal revealed these facts at the end of a murder case in which he was convicted, together with another three soldiers and a policeman. The defendants were tried for the rape and murder of a young female student along with her mother, younger brother and a neighbor who went in search of her.

First the government tried to brush off the allegations, saying that the soldier made the statement out of anger at his conviction. Later, prison officials physically attacked him in order to silence him. However, the soldier later reiterated his allegations to the Criminal Investigation Division of the police, to the International Committee of the Red Cross and to the UN Human Rights Commission.

The government fears the exposure of the military top brass who took control of Jaffna from the LTTE. Failing in delaying tactics, as demands grew for the opening up of the grave, the government organized a

"soil testing" mission on March 5 with experts and took some selected newspaper reporters to the site. Parents and relatives of disappeared sons, daughters and other family members gathered at the site and complained, "the government should have brought the soldier who spoke about the mass grave and who could show the exact location."

The "Movement for Inter Racial Justice and Equality"--a Non-Government Organization--published in its March information bulletin the following story of one mother who came to the site:

"Mallikadevi Selvadurai is a mother of five children. They live on a meager income from a small boutique in Jaffna. Mallikadevi wakes up early in the morning, prepares food and goes to the boutique every day. She comes home late in the evening after her boutique is closed. One day on her way back she heard something that shocked her. She wanted to know what actually happened . . . Her son Jeyaraj had been taken away by the army, who surrounded the house. She could not believe it. Jeyaraj never came back."

The government has now decided to excavate the Chemmani mass grave on June 16.

In the meantime, the LTTE has issued a statement warning government officials not to be involved in the excavation process. Its argument was that the excavations should be done by the international humanitarian bodies, and not by the government, because the work of the government was suspect. It is true that the government's investigation is suspect, but the LTTE's call for international bodies also has a cynical motive. The LTTE seeks the participation of international bodies not because it wants to reveal the true facts but to get the support of these bodies for its campaign for a separate Tamil state. The LTTE has not issued the same call regarding the second mass grave found near Jaffna Stadium, which is linked to the Indian forces, because they are now trying again to woo the support of the Indian ruling class.

Even though the government has fixed a date for the Chemmani excavation, it is trying to use the LTTE threat in order to delay. The Jaffna judge failed to participate in the March 5 soil testing, citing threats from the LTTE..

During the period in which the Indian forces occupied the North and East--from July 1987 to March 1990--killing Tamils, the Sri Lankan government

unleashed state terror in the South, murdering more than 60,000 youths and jailing thousands more, especially in the rural areas.

The PA promised to dig up the mass graves in the country before it came to power, but has done nothing. Recently, at a place called Mamadala in the South, local people found signs of a mass grave. But the government is silent about it.

It points to the fact that the PA government, which depends on repressive measures, really wants to cover up the past state terror. During its own racist war against the Tamil masses, killings and disappearances have become frequent occurrences in the North and East. In the South, the military, police and goon squads are at work against the masses.



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