

New mass grave uncovered at Chemmani in northern Sri Lanka

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In a chilling reminder of the decades-long anti-Tamil racist war, a new mass grave has been discovered at Sittupatthu in Chemmani, on the outskirts of Jaffna town in northern Sri Lanka. This is one of several mass grave sites that have been accidentally found at various places in the North in recent years.

The graves are further evidence of the atrocities committed during the brutal communal war unleashed by successive Colombo governments, which deployed hundreds of thousands of soldiers against the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

During the 26-year war, which ended in May 2009 with the LTTE's defeat, it is estimated that more than 100,000 people—mostly ethnic Tamils in the North and East—were killed. Thousands more were forcibly disappeared. The UN has estimated that about 40,000 civilians were killed during the final months of the war.

These two provinces remain under heavy military control, and the scars of the conflict continue to resurface periodically.

During an excavation for the construction of an electric crematorium at Chemmani's Sinthupaththi Hindu cremation ground, a new mass grave containing fragments of human bones was discovered on February 20. Acting on a court directive, a team of archaeologists led by Professor Raj Somadeva commenced the formal excavation on May 15.

By last week, about 42 human skeletons had been found. According to news reports, 37 complete skeletal remains have been exhumed and carefully preserved for forensic analysis.

The *Sunday Times* reported that last week excavation workers also found a dress, a bag, slippers and a toy. Earlier, uncovered items included clothing, small glass bangles and a blue cloth school bag, which was identified as aid distributed by an aid organisation to schoolchildren in the North and East. So far, according to reports, three skeletal remains have been classified as those of babies younger than 10 months old.

The report states that the human remains were buried just

1.6 feet beneath the surface—an unusually shallow burial in stark contrast to the typical six-foot burial depth.

These bodies will eventually be analysed by medical experts to try to determine the cause of death. Professor Somadeva will examine artefacts such as dated cellophane wrappers and clothing to estimate the time of burial. He also noted that satellite imagery and drone photography had helped identify a second probable burial site within the cemetery.

However, if one takes into account what happened previously when mass graves have been unearthed in the North and East, it is likely that a thorough investigation will be abandoned and the truth will be buried.

This is the second time that a mass grave has been found at the same Chemmani site. Twenty-five years ago, in 1999, a grave containing 15 skeletal remains was uncovered following a confession by Corporal Somaratna Rajapakse, who had served in northern Sri Lanka during 1995–96.

Rajapakse's disclosure came after he was convicted and sentenced to death, along with four other Sri Lankan army personnel, for the rape and murder of Tamil schoolgirl Krishanthi Kumaraswamy and members of her family who went in search of the missing girl.

He provided a chilling account of how the military had captured, tortured and summarily executed individuals who had been arrested or abducted as alleged "LTTE suspects." The incident was extensively reported by the *World Socialist Web Site* at the time. According to information gathered during the 1995–96 period, over 600 persons "disappeared" in the North.

This was during the time when the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga resumed the bloody war in April 1995, ending her bogus peace talks with the LTTE.

When the mass grave was found in 1999, relatives of disappeared persons filed cases in the Jaffna courts. According to the Center for Human Rights and Development, the military later complained it could not obtain justice from the Jaffna courts and requested the cases be transferred to Anuradhapura, the capital of North Central

Province.

However, after attending several court sessions, the people who filed the cases refused to continue attending, citing harassments from the military, resulting in the dismissal of the cases.

The graves at Chemmani represent only a fraction of the widespread war crimes committed by the military with impunity, under the patronage of successive Colombo governments.

More mass graves have been uncovered across the North and East provinces, including discoveries in Thiruketheeswaram, Mannar district in 2013; the Co-operative Wholesale Establishment premises in Mannar in 2018; Kokkuthoduvai, Mullaitivu district in 2021; and Kalavanchikudy, Batticaloa district in 2014.

Excavations were conducted at these places but no further investigations subsequently took place.

The discovery of the latest mass grave has intensified concerns over the fate of the disappeared and sparked opposition among the Tamil population. On June 5, the Association for Relatives of the Enforced Disappearances in the Northern and Eastern Provinces (ARED) issued a statement and held a demonstration near the Chemmani mass grave.

Protesters raised five key demands, including an international investigation adhering to global standards and involving the UN.

Since 2011, the so-called Sri Lanka core group in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), led by the US, UK, Canada and France, has sponsored resolutions on human rights violations during the conflict in Sri Lanka.

However, far from being concerned about war crimes, the US in particular exploited the resolutions to pressure Sri Lankan governments to distance themselves from Beijing and to align with Washington-led military preparations against China.

Under Trump, the US withdrew from the UN human rights body, accusing it of bias against Israel. The UK now heads the so-called core group.

Since 2017, ARED has been active in protests, making appeals to these international powers.

The Tamil National People's Front (TNPF), the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) and various other Tamil nationalist groups and diaspora organisations are responsible for cultivating the myth that these imperialist powers are interested in justice.

This is politically criminal. These same imperialist powers are all responsible for war crimes and currently are fully backing Israel's genocide against Palestinians.

The Tamil parties are appealing to this "international community" not to address human rights, but to put pressure

on Colombo to concede greater powers and privileges to the Tamil elites in the North and East.

The current Sri Lankan government is led by the Sinhala chauvinist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which supported the communal war against the LTTE from its inception. It remains firmly opposed to any genuine investigation into military-perpetrated war crimes.

In October 2024, the JVP-led government reaffirmed its opposition to any international investigation into war crimes by rejecting a UNHRC resolution calling for such an inquiry.

The JVP won office for the first time last year by capitalising on widespread opposition to traditional capitalist parties and promises to protect democratic rights, including those of the Tamil population. It has since abandoned its commitments, along with its other empty election promises.

Tamil people can place no trust in either the imperialist powers or Sri Lankan capitalist politicians—Sinhala or Tamil—to defend their democratic rights. The only political party that has consistently opposed the Colombo government's racist war and gross violations of democratic rights from the outset is the Socialist Equality Party (SEP).

For decades, the SEP and its predecessor the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL) alone demanded the unconditional withdrawal of the military from the North and East, and defended the democratic rights of Tamils as part of the struggle to unite the working class on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program.

For more than a decade, Tamil working people have carried out protests and campaigns seeking justice and demanding an end to continued discrimination. Their bitter experience is that neither the major powers nor Colombo governments, nor imperialist-aligned Tamil parties, will resolve any of their demands.

The SEP has consistently fought to unite Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim workers and to rally the rural poor in the struggle for a Sri Lanka–Eelam Socialist Republic as part of a Federation of Socialist Republics in South Asia. This remains the only viable solution to the ethnic conflict, and is the political means to fight for the basic democratic and social rights of the working class and oppressed masses as a whole.



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