

MANNAR MASS GRAVE PREDATES SRI LANKA'S CIVIL WAR, SAY REPORTS

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The mass grave was discovered in the Northern Province last year.

The nearly 350 skeletons found at a mass grave site in Mannar, in Sri Lanka's Tamil-majority Northern Province, predate the period of the island's civil war by a few centuries, a U.S.-based carbon dating analyst has said. Reports prepared by a testing laboratory in Miami, Florida — where Sri Lanka sent the samples in January — and presented to the Mannar magistrate's court have indicated that the bones belonged to a time period between 1499 A.D. and 1720 A.D., according to local media. The reports were made public on Thursday.

Amidst thousands of complaints of enforced disappearances from the Northern Province, including from Mannar, during the years of the brutal civil war which ended in 2009, the accidental sighting of a mass grave, said to be Sri Lanka's biggest, last year, sparked considerable anxiety and speculation among locals.

The Office on Missing Persons (OMP), set up by the Sri Lankan government in 2016 and tasked with handling the scores of cases of enforced disappearances, funded the transportation and testing of bone samples. Following the report, the OMP said it would await the orders of the Mannar magistrate on further action.

"Until further orders, we will continue our excavation. We are on the 155th day now. We have so far identified 342 skeletons, including those of 29 children," W.R.A.S. Rajapaksa, the consultant judicial medical officer at Mannar District General Hospital and chief investigator at the site told *The Hindu* .

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