



British Tamils Forum United Kingdom

22 October 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHEMMANI MASS GRAVE

BTF URGES RESTRAINT OVER UNVERIFIED NATURAL DISASTER THEORY AND CALLS FOR A TIME-BOUND INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL FORENSIC INVESTIGATION

The British Tamils Forum (BTF) expresses grave concern over the suggestion by Professor Raj Somadeva that the mass burials at Chemmani, Jaffna, may have resulted from an epidemic or natural disaster. Academic records and profile summaries verify that Professor Raj Somadeva's primary areas of expertise and published research focus on settlement archaeology, protohistoric archaeology, and environmental archaeology in Sri Lanka, rather than specialised forensic archaeology or forensic anthropology. Nevertheless, he has frequently been appointed as the principal archaeological authority in mass grave investigations in Sri Lanka.

In light of the recovery of 583 sets of human remains, including remains believed to include children, BTF expresses concern over speculative explanations could undermine the search for truth, compromise the integrity of the evidence, or divert attention from the possibility of unlawful killings. Any explanation must be supported by robust, independently verifiable evidence.

The circumstances surrounding the Chemmani mass grave remain unresolved. The emergence of an epidemic or natural disaster hypothesis, without independently verified historical and scientific evidence establishing that such an event occurred and explaining its connection to the site, raises serious questions that demand transparent and impartial scrutiny.

BTF is deeply concerned that an unsubstantiated natural-disaster narrative could be used to discredit the significance of the discovery or deflect scrutiny from potential criminal responsibility. Any attempt to manipulate, suppress, selectively present, or compromise evidence must be investigated independently. The gravity of these concerns requires urgent safeguards, not assumptions or premature conclusions.

BTF does not claim that the suggestion of an epidemic or natural disaster, by itself, establishes deliberate wrongdoing. Equally, such a hypothesis cannot be accepted as an explanation for the deaths and burials without compelling, independently verifiable evidence. Those advancing the hypothesis to substantiate it through rigorous scientific examination and reliable historical documentation.

The discovery of 583 sets of human remains, alongside reported personal belongings including schoolbags, feeding bottles, toys, and other objects, demands a comprehensive investigation into the identities of the deceased, the dates and circumstances of their deaths, and the reasons their remains were buried at this location.

According to the primary report, an estimated **41% were children and 22% were those of infants**. Human rights organizations and groups representing families of the disappeared have raised concerns that such a high proportion of infants and young children warrants careful investigation into the circumstances of their deaths and the possibility that entire families or civilian communities were



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affected. These concerns must be examined against the historical context of the armed conflict, including the military crackdowns and mass enforced disappearances associated with the Jaffna Peninsula during the 1990s. The demographic findings alone, however, cannot establish the circumstances or causes of death.

Past and recent assessments by the **Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL)** regarding mass graves in the Northern Province, including reports from 2002–2003 and statements relating to Chemmani, have raised serious concerns about burial practices. The HRCSL has reportedly observed that the burial of naked corpses in disorderly heaps is completely incompatible with Hindu or local cultural funeral rites. They have concluded that there is a "**reasonable likelihood that the burials were unlawful and pursuant to extrajudicial killings**".

The archaeological report must be assessed on the basis of its evidence, methodology, limitations, and conclusions. Its underlying records, excavation documentation, photographs, artefact inventories, stratigraphic observations, and other relevant materials must be made available for independent expert scrutiny, subject to appropriate protections for victims and the integrity of judicial proceedings.

BTF is particularly concerned that Sri Lanka's long history of unresolved enforced disappearances, contested investigations, and failures to deliver accountability creates a profound deficit of public confidence. The families of the disappeared have waited decades for answers. They must not now be confronted with explanations that cannot withstand independent scientific examination.

The possibility of a natural disaster must be tested, not presumed. The possibility of unlawful killing must be investigated, not dismissed. Above all, the evidence must be protected from interference, concealment, or manipulation.

BTF calls for the following urgent measures:

1. An independent, internationally led investigation: Deploy accredited international forensic anthropologists, pathologists, and legal observers directly to Chemmani, Mandaitivu, and other active sites to conduct exhumations adhering to international standards, preserve the chain of custody, and prevent tampering. Establish a credible investigative mechanism with meaningful authority and appropriate judicial oversight to examine all plausible explanations and potential criminal conduct without interference from any institution or individual whose actions may themselves require scrutiny.

2. An independent review of the archaeological report: Commission a multidisciplinary panel of international experts - comprising forensic archaeologists, anthropologists, pathologists, human rights investigators, and other relevant specialists - to review the report, its supporting evidence, its methodology, and the limits of its conclusions.

3. A time-bound investigative framework: Establish clear deadlines, transparent milestones, and regular public progress reports. Independent monitoring by international experts must ensure that the investigation does not become another prolonged process in which delays erode public confidence and accountability.

4. Compliance with international forensic standards: Apply the UN Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death and other applicable international standards. All



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examinations must follow documented procedures for evidence recovery, preservation, scientific analysis, chain of custody, and independent verification.

5. Independent identification of the victims:

A. Comprehensive Centralised Database: UN agencies, in coordination with Sri Lankan authorities and relevant independent experts, should **publish** a unified, securely maintained, and cross-verified database of reported enforced disappearances. Subject to the informed consent of relevant individuals, it should include names, dates and locations of disappearance, and contact details for biological relatives willing to participate in identification efforts. The database should facilitate systematic comparison with available records and evidence recovered from mass graves.

B. Internationally Supervised DNA Databank: Reference DNA samples should be collected from consenting biological relatives across Sri Lanka and the Tamil diaspora under independent international oversight. Genetic comparisons should be conducted by appropriately accredited laboratories in the United Kingdom or an EU Member State, with robust safeguards for confidentiality, informed consent, data security, and the lawful use of genetic information.

6. A UK-based satellite and geospatial analysis programme:

Establish an independent satellite-imagery and geospatial analysis programme, based in the United Kingdom, drawing on relevant historical satellite imagery, aerial photographs, topographic data, land-use records, and other available sources.

The programme should examine changes to the site over time, identify possible additional burial areas, trace vehicle movements and routes including points of origin and transit where the evidence permits and assesses whether the available spatial evidence is consistent with competing hypotheses. All findings must be independently validated, documented and preserved in a form suitable for potential judicial proceedings.

7. Preservation of evidence and protection of witnesses:

Secure the excavation site and preserve all human remains, artefacts, photographs, samples, excavation logs, official records, and relevant archives. Establish independent monitoring and appropriate safeguards against intimidation, interference, destruction of evidence, or unauthorised access. Witnesses, survivors, and families of the disappeared must be afforded appropriate protection against threats, harassment, and retaliation.

8. Verification of the epidemic or natural disaster hypothesis:

Require the production and independent examination of relevant historical records, including public-health reports, mortality statistics, death certificates, cemetery and burial registers, contemporaneous administrative records, historical maps, and other available documentation.

Any proposed explanation must be assessed against the archaeological, forensic, historical, and epidemiological evidence. Neither an epidemic nor a natural disaster should be accepted or rejected without a rigorous examination of the available evidence.



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9. Accountability and access to justice:

Ensure that all evidence capable of establishing criminal responsibility is preserved and made available to competent, independent international judicial authorities, including relevant international mechanisms where they have jurisdiction or other lawful authority to act.

Where the evidence establishes criminal conduct, those responsible must be held accountable through fair proceedings consistent with international law, regardless of their position or institutional affiliation.

An urgent test of international accountability

The Sri Lankan authorities must not be allowed to determine unilaterally the scope, standards, and pace of an investigation into a discovery of this magnitude. The country lacks both the political resolve and specialised scientific facilities, including **bomb-pulse carbon-14 dating**, to conduct an adequate inquiry.

The international community, including the United Kingdom, the European Union, the United Nations, and relevant international human-rights mechanisms, must move beyond expressions of concern and press for an international investigation process capable of establishing the truth independently and impartially.

The Chemmani mass grave must not become another case in which competing narratives replace evidence and the passage of time defeats justice.

BTF calls for the immediate protection of all evidence, an independent examination of the claims now being advanced, and a transparent international investigative framework capable of determining what happened, identifying the victims, and establishing responsibility wherever the evidence leads.

The victims and their families deserve truth, dignity, and justice. The evidence must not be compromised. Accountability must not be postponed indefinitely.

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Notes to Editors:

British Tamils Forum exists to harness the skills and the knowledge of the members of the forum, well-wishers and significant others including mainstream decision makers in the UK with the aim of alleviating the sufferings of the Tamils community in the Island of Sri Lanka and to further their right to self-determination within a democratic frame work under pinned by international law, its covenants and conventions. For more information info@britishtamilsforum.org and/or visit: www.britishtamilsforum.org