Sri Lankan authorities have excavated nearly 100 skeletons at a mass grave in Mannar, located in Sri Lanka’s Northern Province, where state armed forces and Tamil rebels clashed in a 30-year civil war.

According to local media reports, some locals living in the Tamil-majority province, whose relatives went missing during and after the war, have raised concern about the bodies possibly having links to the many enforced disappearances reported in Mannar.

However, investigating officials said it would be difficult to establish any connection before a comprehensive analysis and accurate carbon dating. “We are on our 58th day of excavation and so far, nearly 100 skeletons have been found. We have kept the remains in a separate room in the magistrate court premises,” Consultant Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) W.R.A.S. Rajapaksa told The Hindu on Monday. Mr. Rajapaksa, attached to the District General Hospital in Mannar, is the chief investigator, working with the team of medical officers, forensic experts and senior archaeologists.

Of the skeletal remains, at least eight bodies were of children, senior archaeologist Raj Somadeva — excavating at the site — told The Hindu. The excavation began in May this year, based a court order, after construction workers reported sighting apparent skeletal remains at a site in Mannar.

Once the excavation is complete, the bones will have to be tested and analysed further to establish the duration of decomposition.

This is the second major instance of dozens of bodies being exhumed in Mannar since the war ended in 2009. In February 2014, as many as 30 skulls were found near a mass grave at the famed Thiruketheeswaram temple, but the investigation was not completed.

In other instances, mass graves were found in the central and southern parts of the island. In March 2013, a Sri Lankan judge pointed to evidence indicating that 150 human skulls and bones, recovered from a mass grave Matale in Sri Lanka’s Central Province, had been buried there about 25 years ago.

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At least eight of the skeletal remains were of children, says archaeologist