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## Skeleton Found in Dharmasthala Mass Burial Probe Marks Breakthrough for SIT

August 1, 2025

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In a major development in the ongoing investigation into the Dharmasthala mass burial case, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) has recovered partial human skeletal remains from the sixth excavation site. The discovery was made near the Nethravathi River in Belthangady taluk, Dakshina Kannada district.

The skeletal fragments were found at a depth of approximately four feet and are believed to belong to a male individual. This marks the first physical evidence uncovered in a probe that has involved excavations at six different sites so far. The earlier five sites yielded no human remains.

The investigation began after a whistleblower, a former sanitation worker, came forward with claims that he was forced to bury bodies of individuals, including women and minors, over a span of nearly two decades. He alleged that these victims were murdered or sexually assaulted between 1995 and 2014. His testimony led authorities to identify 13 suspected burial sites across forested areas and riverbanks in the region.

The SIT, formed by the Karnataka government on July 19, began the excavation process on July 29. The whistleblower had earlier submitted bone fragments and testified before a magistrate. Following the recent recovery, the site has been sealed off and forensic experts have taken custody of the remains for further DNA analysis and verification.

The discovery is seen as a potential turning point in the investigation. Police teams are now deploying canine units and expanding searches to other marked locations. State health minister Dinesh Gundu Rao has reiterated the government's commitment to ensuring a transparent and impartial probe.

Activist groups and legal advocates have urged the SIT to be given full autonomy, especially in light of earlier cases of missing women in the region, such as the unresolved 2012 murder of student Sowjanya. Many believe that the current findings could help reopen cold cases and reveal long-concealed crimes.

Senior police officials involved in the case have emphasized the importance of methodical analysis and credible evidence. They believe the recovery at the sixth site could substantiate the whistleblower's claims and possibly lead to further discoveries as the investigation continues.

The SIT will now await forensic reports before proceeding with additional excavations. The remains recovered are expected to play a crucial role in determining the scale and scope of the alleged mass burials.