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Reuters

## Mass grave sparks speculation in north Afghanistan

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A mass grave that might be decades old, containing dozens of skulls, was found in north Afghanistan on Thursday, Afghan officials said.

Villagers discovered the grave in the Rustaq district in the province of Takhar, said Faiz Mohammad Tawhidi, a spokesman for the Takhar governor.

Mr. Tawhidi and other officials estimated between 20 and 30 bodies had been recovered. Mr. Tawhidi said an initial investigation showed it was up to 70 years old, while other locals estimated the bodies dated back only 15 years.

“We are investigating and it is not clear how many more have been buried in this grave,” Mr. Tawhidi said.

Abdul Momin, an elder of the Sar Asyab village near where the grave was found, believed the grave dated back between 15 and 20 years to the country’s bloody civil war period when a commander in the area, Peram Qul, was based there.

He said many people were labelled “anti-government elements” and killed.

Peram Qul, who is also a former Afghan lawmaker, denied any role in the killings and said on Thursday the grave dated back further to when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and claimed all the skulls belonged to mujahideen fighters.

The discovery of the grave is yet another indication of the country’s turbulent history.

The Rustaq district is not far from where mujahideen commander and resistance hero Ahmad Shah Massoud was assassinated in 2001.

Fighting between the Taliban and other insurgents and Afghan government and U.S. and NATO forces has dragged on since then.