



Workers at the government-run Mandai Crematorium are not allowed to receive cash or gifts, but some industry insiders said the illegal practice has gone on quietly for decades. At least three workers from different companies were called in for questioning by the CPIB this week. LIANHE ZAOBAO FILE PHOTOS

Workers at crematorium in trouble over red packets

CPIB questions some over practice of accepting gifts from bereaved families at Mandai facility

**Cara Wong
and Charmaine Ng**

Crematorium workers who take red packets from bereaved families and funeral directors who pass them on to these workers are now in trouble with the authorities over this practice at the government-run Mandai Crematorium.

In the past week, more than 20 workers from private funeral businesses as well as crematorium workers have reportedly been hauled up by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB), said Shin Min Daily News yesterday.

Checks by The Straits Times found at least three workers from different companies were called in for questioning by the CPIB this week, while another two were questioned as witnesses of the practice. The three were later released on a bail of \$20,000 each.

The CPIB and National Environment Agency (NEA), which runs the Mandai Crematorium, confirmed investigations are ongoing.

NEA said it received information late last year that some Mandai Crematorium staff had allegedly been accepting red packets from funeral directors in the course of their work. "NEA takes a serious view of these allegations and immediately reported the matter to the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau for their follow-up," said a spokesman.

But some industry insiders were baffled by the timing of the investigations, saying the illegal practice has gone on quietly for decades, and that funeral directors merely pass the red packets to workers on behalf of families.

Chinese and Indian families willingly give such packets, which are seen as an auspicious gesture to "bless" the workers with good



One of the signs put up at Mandai Crematorium to remind the public not to offer money or gifts to the employees.

luck, funeral directors told ST.

Families typically give sums ranging from \$2 to \$50, although they may be advised to give about \$20 or \$24, which is the "market rate" for such red packets, they said.

The funeral directors emphasised that they do not press the families to give the red packets, and some families offer the red packets without prompting.

Funeral directors do not benefit in any way from conveying such packets to the crematorium workers, and there is no preferential treatment given to those who do so, they claimed.

"The whole process of cremation is very systematic. It's not as though by giving them a hongbao, we will get better times (for cremation) or better treatment," said a funeral director.

However, he said some workers at the crematorium may have taken this gesture of goodwill as a given, and may feel disgruntled if they do not get them.

Another funeral director said red packets are usually discreetly given, as it is well known that workers are not allowed to receive gifts. "It's an industrywide practice,

but we all know it's not allowed," said the funeral director, whose employee was questioned by the CPIB on Wednesday and released the same day on a bail of \$20,000.

Association of Funeral Directors president Ang Zi Sheng said he found out about the investigations from the Chinese papers.

"We encourage members and the public to comply with regulations set out by NEA of not giving any gifts of any nature to crematorium staff," said Mr Ang.

Signs cautioning the public against handing money or gifts to crematorium workers are posted outside all of the crematorium's service halls and in waiting areas.

A 61-year-old retiree attending a funeral there said he was not aware of the practice.

"We weren't asked by the undertaker to give any red packets. If they had asked, we would have given also, because we're not aware that it's not allowed and we wouldn't have known any better," said the man, who declined to be named.

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ARETIREE, who was attending a funeral, on not being aware of the practice. He declined to be named.