

SingPost Centre death: Questions remain over how man ended up in stairwell

Where missing man's body was found

In Mr Soh Eng Thong's last phone conversation with his daughter last Saturday, he told her he was at SingPost Centre. On Tuesday afternoon, the police found his body in the Basement 3 South Lobby stairwell.

Staff in shops at Paya Lebar mall say basement carpark next to the stairwell has been closed for over a year

Jean Iau

After an elderly man was reported missing by his family last Saturday, three days passed before his body was found in a stairwell at SingPost Centre, a mall in Paya Lebar.

The police are still investigating the matter.

Questions abound over what could have happened, including when he entered the stairwell, how he could have got in there, and why no one saw him.

Mr Soh Eng Thong, 78, a retired taxi driver, had left his Haig Road home on foot last Friday night, saying he was going to attend a wake. He did not return.

His family called his mobile phone repeatedly. He finally picked up the call the next morning. He told his daughter he was at SingPost Centre and that his legs were tired.

The family, who said Mr Soh did not have dementia, searched the mall, which is about 1km from their home. They could not find him and made a police report.

Mr Soh's body was found on Tuesday afternoon in the stairwell of the South Lobby of Basement 3, which is adjacent to a carpark that is not in use.

Visitors to the mall and staff who work in shops there said the Basement 3 carpark has been closed for over a year.

A supervisor at the Twelve Cupcakes outlet said yesterday that cleaners often stay past 10pm and would have spotted anyone in the mall. The cupcake shop is in Basement 1 and about 30m from the South Lobby stairwell.

The supervisor, who wished to be known only as Ms Pineda, 40, added: "I don't think anyone goes to Basement 3, and I never see people take the stairs."

Cleaners and security guards at jeaniau@sph.com.sg

the mall declined to speak about the matter.

Yesterday afternoon, lift access to Basement 3 had been sealed off and barriers were put up in the carpark to prevent drivers from accessing it.

The South Lobby stairwell is also accessible through an obscure door at the side of the mall on the first floor, facing MRT tracks. The mall is next to Paya Lebar MRT station.

The doors in the stairwell lead to lift lobbies on each floor. The doors are one-way – once shut, it is not possible to access the lift lobbies from the stairwell. To exit the stairwell from Basement 3, one would have to take the stairs up to the ground level.

The stairwell was observed to be lit with motion-detector lights and had air vents. Closed-circuit television cameras were spotted outside the stairwell door on the first floor, but not inside the stairwell.

The police said they were alerted about a body at 3.15pm on Tuesday. They found Mr Soh lying motionless, and he was pronounced dead by a paramedic. Preliminary investigations do not suggest foul play.

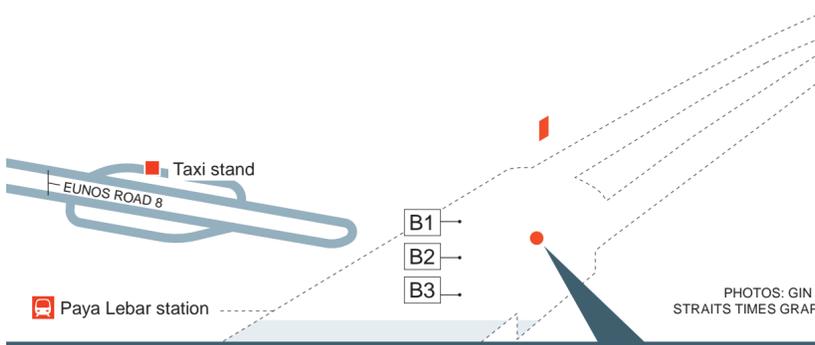
A spokesman for SingPost expressed its condolences to Mr Soh's family and said it is assisting with investigations.

Mr Soh's son, Mr David Soh, 49, who works in sales, told The Straits Times: "Our burning question is, how did he even walk there and when?"

He added that when his father's body was found, his belongings were neatly laid out.

"It's usual for him. At home, he also places his things very neatly so it's easier to find," said Mr David Soh.

"They said they found him lying to Basement 3, and I never see people take the stairs."



PHOTOS: GIN T STRAITS TIMES GRAPHIC

Mr Soh's body was found in B3 South Lobby stairwell

Mr Soh Eng Thong had been missing since last Friday, when he told his family he was going to attend a wake. The body of the 78-year-old was found on Tuesday afternoon in the stairwell of the South Lobby of Basement 3 at SingPost Centre. PHOTO: COURTESY OF SOH ENG THONG'S FAMILY

New feature on OneService app to alert the authorities to people in need

Goh Yan Han

Residents who spot a rough sleeper in need can now tap a feature on the OneService application that will alert social service agencies to the location, so assistance can be provided quickly.

With the Help Neighbour feature, residents also do not have to determine the correct agency to contact or hotline to call.

The new feature, which was piloted on June 30 by the Municipal Services Office (MSO), Ministry of Social and Family Development

(MSF) and Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), uses geo-tagged data. Such data provides location and geographical details, among other things.

For a start, the agencies are focusing on four main groups of people commonly flagged by neighbours: vulnerable seniors, rough sleepers, cardboard collectors and tissue paper sellers who may be in need. Those not in these four groups can be categorised as "Others" on the app.

As at last month, feedback on people in need had been submitted 58 times, with about 60 per cent of these referrals already known to

the agencies. This means the other 40 per cent picked up were new cases that were added to the agencies' radar, said Ms Sim Ann, who oversees the MSO, in a Facebook post yesterday.

Of the feedback received, 24 were about vulnerable seniors, 19 were rough sleepers, nine related to tissue paper sellers and six were cardboard collectors. Ms Sim, who is Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and National Development, told The Straits Times.

In a statement, MSO, MSF and AIC said that residents are encouraged to engage the person in need first – when it is deemed safe and respectful to the person's privacy – to better understand his or her needs and if assistance is indeed required.

Ms Sim, in her Facebook post, said the Help Neighbour feature enables concerned strangers to report their encounters with potentially vulnerable persons and have these routed directly to social service agencies, without risking over-exposing the person on social media.

She noted that this was especially relevant, as some cases involve complicated family dynamics, and public exposure can mean greater pressure on already strained family relations.

Ms Sim added that the data collected will allow the agencies to check if there are geographical concentrations or settings where vulnerable people are most likely encountered, and facilitate better planning of outreach activities.

Ms Angeline Yong, deputy head of the Silver Generation Office in Jalan Besar, said that during the pilot phase, she received alerts about two seniors who are known to her office.

The Silver Generation Office is AIC's outreach arm that links seniors to support.

One alert was from a member of the public who had assumed one of the women was a rough sleeper based on her appearance. After being notified through e-mail, the team headed to the location and discovered the woman was someone who was already receiving support.

The member of the public was informed of the outcome.

Ms Yong said: "This app will allow us to help us locate seniors who we have not been successful in engaging with through home visits previously."

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Ex-LTA deputy group director jailed for 5½ years for taking \$1.2m in bribes

Wong Shiying

A former Land Transport Authority (LTA) deputy group director was yesterday sentenced to 5½ years' jail for taking about \$1.24 million in bribes in the form of loans from contractors and subcontractors.

Henry Foo Yung Thye, 47, who chalked up debts from his gambling addiction, was also ordered to pay a penalty of \$1,156,250, equivalent to the

amount he had not returned. The Singaporean had earlier pleaded guilty to seven counts of corruption. Another 29 charges, including those of cheating, were taken into consideration for sentencing.

Deputy Presiding Judge Jennifer Marie said Foo had persistently asked contractors and subcontractors for loans between 2014 and 2019, and the bribes involved were more than \$100,000 for each of the charges he was found guilty of.

Investigations found that the gratification came from contractors and subcontractors who had about \$815 million in contracts with LTA that Foo oversaw.



Henry Foo Yung Thye, 47, who had a gambling addiction, must pay a penalty equivalent to the amount he had not returned.

"The appalling conduct displayed reveals a man who had no qualms in persistently... corrupting the very people he was

expected to have a watchful oversight of," the judge said. "Some harm would also have been caused to the competitors of the giver of the gratification as they would not be able to compete on an even playing field."

Foo had joined LTA in 1999 and rose to become the deputy group director of the Thomson-East Coast and Cross Island lines.

This position gave him oversight of the construction of tunnels and MRT stations such as Havelock, Stevens, Great World, Napier and Orchard.

The individuals Foo sought loans from included directors of firms such as Tiong Seng Contractors, MEPT Engineering, Tritch Engineering & Testing and China Railway Tunnel's Singapore branch.

In exchange, he promised to advance their business interests with LTA or shared confidential infor-

mation pertaining to LTA tenders. His offences came to light in October 2018, when the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau received an anonymous complaint that Foo had been soliciting loans from LTA subcontractors.

Foo resigned from LTA in September 2019. Among the seven people and you will have put this whole episode behind you and not re-

main in guilt and shame... Atone for your mistakes and serve the community. Be a person your children will be proud of."

For corruption, Foo could have been fined up to \$100,000 and jailed for up to five years for each offence. If the offence is related to matter or contract with the Government or a public body, the maximum jail term for each offence can be increased to seven years.

"The accused was aware that what he was doing was wrong and

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