

Stern CPIB warnings for crematorium staff who got red packets

17 also faced departmental disciplinary action; funeral service firm employees also warned

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Crematorium workers from the National Environment Agency (NEA) have been given stern warnings by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) for receiving red packets from funeral service companies in return for preferential treatment.

A total of 17 workers at the Mandai Crematorium were each given a stern warning for one count of corruptly accepting gratification in the form of red packets from funeral directors and hearse drivers “to smoothen the cremation process”, the CPIB said in a statement yesterday.

As for the funeral service companies, two employees were given stern warnings for abetment to corruptly give gratification in the form of red packets to NEA staff to smoothen the cremation process at Mandai Crematorium.

Twelve others from these companies were also given stern warnings for corruptly giving gratification to NEA staff.

The Straits Times understands that the warnings were issued to the 31 in lieu of prosecution as there was a lack of evidence to suggest that the crematorium workers had failed to perform their duties or shown disfavour to families who did not pay red packets.

The 17 workers also faced departmental disciplinary action for violating public-sector rules which disallow public officers accepting gifts and entertainment on account of their official position or official work, the CPIB added.

Separately, two senior NEA officers also faced disciplinary action for failing to report the practice even though they were fully aware of it, said CPIB.

In a separate statement, the NEA said it would be taking appropriate disciplinary actions against the 17 crematorium workers and two senior officers, without giving details of these actions.

The statement from CPIB comes nearly a year after it was notified by the NEA of a complaint that Mandai Crematorium workers had been receiving red packets in return for preferential treatment.

The Straits Times understands that the 31 crematorium workers and staff from the funeral service companies were issued the warnings yesterday.

An affected funeral director, who declined to give his name, expressed relief at receiving a warning and not being prosecuted, noting that his company had stopped the practice early this year. Other funeral directors interviewed earlier by ST also noted that they had stopped the practice early this year when news of the probe broke.

Those convicted of corrupt transactions could face up to five years in jail and/or a fine of up to \$100,000.

In its statement yesterday, the NEA said its staff from the Mandai Crematorium and Columbarium as well as Choa Chu Kang Cemetery have been reminded not to accept any red packets or gifts from members of the public.

More signs have also been put up to remind the public to refrain from giving red packets or gifts to NEA staff, the agency added.

Supervision of NEA officers and contractors has also been tightened, it said.

The CPIB emphasised that the bureau evaluates all complaints and information it receives seriously, “regardless of the value or nature of gratification involved”, in order to determine whether corruption offences are made out.

“Each case must be assessed on its own merits to determine if it is a case of corruption,” it added.

The bureau explained that a gift given innocently and without any corrupt intention is not considered corruption. “However, if a gift is

given or received with a view to securing, or to reciprocating with, for example an unfair advantage, it may be corruption,” it added.

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