

AICCTU-KARNATAKA



DIGNITY DISPOSED

**Report on Crematorium and Burial
Ground Workers in Bengaluru during
the COVID-19 pandemic**

MAY 2021

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*A Report on Crematorium and Burial Ground workers in
Bengaluru during the COVID-19 pandemic*

**ALL INDIA CENTRAL COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS (AICCTU) –
KARNATAKA**

MAY 2021

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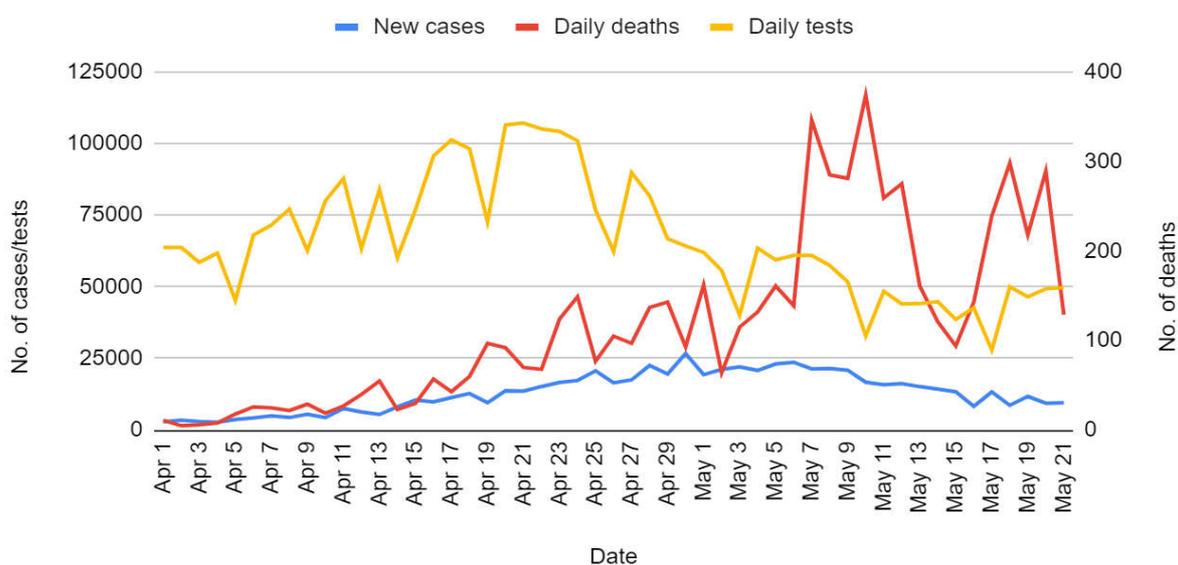
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Introduction

The widespread infection during the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the reality of, and further strained, an already bare public health system. The high number of deaths has also put a strain on the crematoriums and burial grounds in Bengaluru city. While there were several circulars on precautions to be taken during the cremations / burials to ensure the dignity of the deceased, there has been very little thought to the concerns of the workers.

As is clear from the graph below, there has been a significant increase in the number of deaths since April 2021. From news reports, it is clear that the city was not prepared for these large numbers. This massive increase has drastically heightened the amount of work that falls on the shoulders of crematorium and burial ground staff.

New cases, Daily deaths and Daily tests in Bengaluru



According to some newspaper reports, there are 42 crematoriums and 58 burial grounds in Bengaluru. The city on an average saw 30,000 cremations/burials in a year before the outbreak of the pandemic. According to a newspaper report in July 2020, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) had plans to construct 10 crematoriums cum burial grounds totalling an area of 35.2 acres, which would have space to bury the dead and 2 electric crematoriums¹. However, there is no update on the current status of these plans.

In the early days of the 2nd wave, the existing crematoriums / burial grounds were overwhelmed with the large number of deceased COVID-19 victims, far more than their capacity, were being brought there. This resulted in workers working for several hours more than prescribed under

¹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/facing-crunch-bbmp-earmarks-space-for-10-new-cemeteries/articleshow/76757652.cms>

the law. Yet, clearly, the state government way back in November 2020, had anticipated that there would be an increasing number of deaths and had planned to increase the number of crematoriums / burial grounds. But the lack of any preparedness and general laxity by the government has brought us to the current situation. Had the government proceeded with the plans – both for space as well as workers, neither would families be left waiting for several hours to lay their dear ones to rest, nor would the workers have to work under such pressure and unhealthy conditions.

Crematorium and burial ground workers in India already live on the margins of society. They predominantly belong to the Dalit community and have been doing this work inter-generationally, as it is a caste-ordained occupation. Workers in several crematoriums and burial grounds are 3rd - 6th generation workers. A crematorium worker in Sumanahalli said that all workers in the crematorium are Dalit except one who is an OBC, who happened to be a friend of the workers in this crematorium and started working here since he was in need of employment. Cremating and burying the dead being a 'traditional' occupation (a term used to gentrify what is basically a stigmatised occupation), it already tends to attract informal employment, whether the facilities are owned and run by the government or private trusts. The government's inaction has therefore impacted these workers manifold.

It is with this intention that AICCTU - Karnataka sought to understand the implications of COVID-19, the 2nd wave and lockdown on the lives and work of crematorium / burial ground workers and their families.

Methodology

A team of 3 members (including 1 volunteer²) visited 26 crematoriums / burial grounds across Bengaluru city between May 4th – May 8th. There are 3 types of crematoriums / burial grounds:

1. Crematoriums and burial grounds administered by BBMP
2. Temporary crematoriums set up during the 2nd wave
3. Burial grounds administered by private trusts

On April 25, 2021, the BBMP announced 7 dedicated crematoriums for COVID-19 victims. In BBMP and Muslim burial grounds separate space for COVID-19 burials have been allocated. In some Christian burial grounds, burials of families who already own slots are allowed. The Christian burial ground is the only one where families who do not have a plot reserved can bury their family members. The following are the list of 23 crematoriums / burial grounds visited under each category:

Category	Name of crematorium / burial ground
Crematoriums and burial grounds administered by BBMP	Kudlu, Panathur, Kengeri, Sumanahalli, Peenya, Banashankari, Mysore Road, Yelahanka, Wilson Garden, Chamrajpet (wood burning) Kalpalli Hindu crematorium and burial ground, Harishchandra Ghat crematorium and burial ground, Wilson Garden Hindu burial ground
Temporary crematoriums set up during the 2 nd wave	Tavarekere, Giddenahalli
Burial grounds administered by private trusts	Kalpalli Christian Cemetery, Indian Christian Cemetery (Hosur Road), St. Patrick's Cemetery, Sacred Heart's Cemetery, Muslim burial ground in Jamia Masjid (Madiwala), Wilson Garden Muslim burial ground, Muslim Burial Ground (Padarayanapura), Khuddus Saheb Muslim Burial Ground

We also visited the Lingayat burial ground (Chamrajapet), Jewish burial ground (Padarayanapura) and Parsi burial ground (Guttahalli). However, there are no COVID-19 burials taking place in the Lingayat burial ground as the community is opting to cremate victims of the illness. The Jewish burial ground is owned by a Jewish family and used only for members of that family. The Parsi burial ground has been there since the times of Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar and is not currently being used.

We met the workers and spoke to them at length for the purposes of this Report. The questionnaire used is attached as Annexure 1. However, in Muslim burial ground at Padrayanapura we were able to meet the administration and not talk to the workers directly. Summaries regarding each of the crematoriums / burial grounds is attached as Annexure 2.

² We are grateful to Ms. Kripa Krishna for her contributions towards the making of this report.

Status of Workers

I. In Regard to Cremations / Burials

Prior to COVID-19, the number of deceased persons who were given their last rites were minimal to around 0-5 a day in the crematoriums. After COVID-19, notably post April 2021, each site receives a minimum of 5 deceased persons and stretches to approximately 75 a day. Most COVID-19 related deaths are being cremated, but there are burials being conducted at Kalpalli, Madiwala, Hosur, Khuddus Saheb, Mysore Road burial grounds. The Kalpalli Hindu burial site has been provided with one JCB for COVID-19 burials only. However, one JCB is not enough at the pace of deaths taking place in the city. Initially, the JCB owner was charging Rs. 5000/- for digging one grave, however, later the government has announced that the families need not pay for this and that they would take care of the JCB bill. That the government took responsibility to cover the costs for a dignified burial of victims of Covid, unfortunately, it does not show the same commitment to human beings who are doing the same work manually, which for a human being proves to be quite literally back breaking.

In the electric crematoriums, workers start their day around 6.00 – 7.00 am and continue working till late in the evening around 7.00 – 8.00 pm. While cremations in these crematoriums start around 9.00 am, the workers need to maintain and prepare the machines before the start of the day and in the evenings, the workers need to clean the crematorium and compound since flowers and other material used for last rites are left strewn around. The COVID-19 crematoriums reported that they were cremating 35-40 deceased persons a day.

In the 3 crematoriums where wood is used to cremate the deceased persons, the process takes much longer. Workers start work around 5.00 am and finish sometimes even at 1.00 - 2.00 in the night. Cremations start at 11.00 am and go on until 5.00 – 6.00 pm. Cremations using wood take much longer than when using electricity. The Tavarekere crematorium has 40 slots and the Giddenahalli crematorium has 50 slots. Yet, at the peak of the 2nd wave, these crematoriums were cremating sometimes almost twice their capacity. The pyres would burn through the night and the workers would start collecting the ashes at 6.00 am since family members would come from 8.00 am to collect them. The workers come from 30 – 35 kms from the crematoriums and travel by auto for this.

It must also be noted that the workers are dealing with an unprecedented workload. In Kalpalli Christian Cemetery, the workers stated that it takes about 4 hours to dig a grave and with the present situation wherein they are burying about 18 deceased persons a day, it must take approximately 72 hours a day to dig graves. There are additional workers helping out the existing workers with the digging. Therefore, not only were the grave-diggers seeking assistance from additional workers employed during this time, but were also working overtime. None of the workers are compensated for the overtime work being done. The same will be taking a toll on their health and make them susceptible to bodily injuries. The workers are also

not being given enough time to rest themselves and are overworked, thus compromising their immunity.

II. Working Conditions

Based on our visits to the 23 crematoriums / cemeteries in Bengaluru, we found that workers are not paid even minimum wages, nor given any statutory or constitutional benefits extended to a 'worker'. Rather, in some instances, they are not even considered workers and instead are termed as 'caretakers' of burial grounds. They work under very precarious working conditions as detailed further in the Report.

Crematoriums / burial grounds under the administration of the BBMP have a Writer who keeps records in the facility. Overall functioning is the responsibility of the Supervisor. The BBMP facilities have not more than 3 – 4 regular workers who have been issued identity cards. The other workers stated that they worked on a 'contract' basis, but were unable to inform us as to the form or nature of the contract.

1. Minimum Wages

BBMP Administered Crematorium / Burial Grounds

The workers in electric crematoriums are not paid wages on a monthly basis and the payment of wages is extremely irregular. They receive wages in an arbitrary manner, sometimes once in 3 months, sometimes once in 6 months, and sometimes even once a year. There were workers who have not been paid wages for a year, and some for even three years! Workers said that they have been informed that their wages are Rs. 10,500/- per month (although notified minimum wages are Rs. 13,132.60/- per month), and that the same would be increased to Rs. 14,000/- per month. However, neither has such increase taken place, nor are they paid even Rs. 10,500/- on time. In respect of some workers they were paid much less than even Rs. 10,500/- and that too only once every few month. As stated above, they only receive arbitrary amounts once every few months.

None of the workers spoken to were aware of the calculations for their wages, neither were they aware of the deductions made. They are not provided with wage slips. One worker at Kalpalli Hindu Crematorium stated that the workers are paid a lumpsum each year as wages due to them.

The caretaker of the Wilson Garden Hindu Burial Ground said he earned Rs. 1,000/- per month, whereas the caretaker at the Madiwala Muslim Burial Ground was paid Rs. 2,000/- every month. However, the grave-digger at the Madiwala Muslim burial Ground earned Rs. 2,000/- for every grave and shared the amount with a helper. The workers are mostly dependent on the largesse of the families who perform the last rites of their loved ones.

The additional workforce who have been hired to deal with the increase in workload are not aware of how much they will be paid or even when they will be paid. Workers in Kudlu electric

crematorium stated that the BBMP has prepared a list of such workers, but are not aware of when they will be paid wages.

Temporary crematoriums

The workers who are presently designated to work at the temporary mass cremation sites have not been informed of when their payments will be done or how much they will be paid. The workers informed AICCTU that Sri. Suresh of the Dr. BR Ambedkar Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, Graveyard Workers Wing is in process of negotiating the wages with the BBMP for those workers employed at the mass cremation sites.

Burial grounds operated by private trusts

The grave-diggers at the Kalpalli Christian Cemetery said they earned Rs. 5,500/- a month, over and above Rs. 150/- that is paid to them for each grave they dig. While the Church authorities receives Rs. 500 for each grave that is dug, Rs. 150/- is given to the workers. The workers at the Hosur Indian Christian Cemetery said that they are paid Rs. 10,000/- per month.

In the case of all kinds of crematoriums / burial grounds, a number of workers have had to help perform cremation and burial work. Due to the caste ordained nature of the work, they are mostly the family or friends of the existing workers. However, the government has made absolutely no provision regarding the increased workload and new workers. The additional workers who are employed at present receive no wages and the wages earned by the workers are shared with them.

As per Minimum Wage notification dated 05.08.2016 bearing notification no. KAE 71 LWA 2015, these workers have to receive Rs. 11,011/- as basic wages along with a Variable Dearness Allowance of Rs. 2,121.60/-, which is a total of Rs. 13,132.60/- per month.

The National Human Rights Commission has, in fact, issued advisory bearing No. F. No. R-18/18/2020-PRP&P(RU-1) dated 14.05.2021 for upholding the Dignity and Protecting the Rights of the Dead, wherein the following is stated:

Staff handling dead bodies to be protected and fairly paid: Since the staff at crematoriums, burial grounds, mortuaries, etc., are working round the clock during this wave of pandemic, they may be paid fair wages to compensate their hard work. Further, they should be vaccinated on priority basis keeping in view the risk they are exposed to.

However, what is apparent is that the workers are paid arbitrary amounts and are mostly dependent on the largesse of the families who are conducting the last rites of their loved ones.

2. *Social Security and other legal entitlements*

BBMP Administered Crematorium / Burial Grounds

The workers are not registered under the Employees' State Insurance act or the Employee's Provident Fund Act and are thus deprived of any benefits under the same. Further, they are also denied of their legal entitlements including annual bonus, gratuity, etc. They are also not provided any festival bonus, allowances for uniform, housing rent, overtime, food, transport, allowance for children's education, or dearness allowance, either. They are not provided with any holidays and work throughout the year. When they apply leave for any family functions or personal reasons, their wages are deducted for the days not worked, and are not ensured the leave they are entitled to.

At the Harishchandra Ghat crematorium, the workers were promised an incentive of Rs. 1,200/- for every cremation done of a COVID-19 victim, which would be paid along with their wages. The same has not been fulfilled thus far.

The workers are not provided with any health insurance coverage - be it in the form of ESI or any other health insurance scheme of the State or Central Government. Further those workers who are old, give up on the work, while their sons continue with the work of cremation or burial in place of their father. Therefore, the workers are not provided with any benefits of retirement - such as gratuity, pension or retirement compensation.

Importantly, under existing labour legislations, workers who are employed for over 8 hours are required to be paid wages at double the rate for the excess period worked. Therefore, a worker who works for 12 hours daily is entitled to 16 hours payment. However, the workers are deprived of even this benefit.

In the case of temporary crematoriums and burial grounds administered by private trusts, the workers have not been provided any social security.

3. *Employment injuries, lack of medical treatment and compensation*

BBMP Administered Crematorium / Burial Grounds

The BBMP has not registered workers under the Employees State Insurance Act, under which the workers can avail of medical and various other benefits, including in case of workplace accidents or hazards arising therefrom. They are also not beneficiaries of any health insurance scheme of the State or Central Government or any private insurance.

At the Yelahanka crematorium, a worker suffered from slip-disc and has not been able to attend to work ever since. Despite this, the BBMP has not provided any help to the worker, and neither has he been paid his salary for the time he has been on sick leave. The worker has approached Shri. Gaurav Gupta, the present BBMP Commissioner, who has promised help, and is waiting for follow-up on the same. In another such incident at the Harishchandra Ghat crematorium, a worker suffered from a major injury when he was pushing a trolley. This worker suffered from

a slip disc and it cost him Rs. 2 lakh for the medical treatment. Despite these workplace accidents and work hazards suffered by the workers, the BBMP does not compensate the workers. In fact, there has been a non-COVID-19 related death of a worker at this crematorium and the BBMP has not taken cognizance of the same and has failed to compensate his family.

Even the medical treatment is paid for by the workers themselves. At the Kalpalli Hindu Crematorium, one of the workers had injured his fingers while lifting a tombstone, which fell on his hand crushing two fingers. He said that he went to a local clinic to get the hand treated and spent money from his pockets. The BBMP did not help. Similarly, at the Panathur Electric Crematorium, one of the workers burnt his hand while carrying out a cremation and the cost of treatment was borne by the nearby villagers. Even in this case, the BBMP did not compensate the worker.

The BBMP has instituted supervisors at each of the crematoriums run by them to oversee the running of the crematorium. Despite this, the workers who suffer from occupational hazards are not looked after.

Workers in the Kalpalli Christian Cemetery said that in case of any illness or accidents, they are left to their means to seek medical help.

4. Workers Mobilisation

In all the electric crematoriums run by the BBMP, the Dr. BR Ambedkar Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, Graveyard Workers Wing had members, and as an extension, where the mass cremation centres have been setup and since the workers have been working in crematoriums, they were members of the Samiti employed there as well.

The workers at the mass cremation centres of Tavarekere and Giddenahalli were asked to temporarily shift their work base from their usual crematoriums by Shri. Suresh, the leader of the Samiti.

The workers told AICCTU that the Samiti was fighting for regularisation of service, increase in wages, provision of health insurance, among other demands. However, it must be noted that the Samiti had membership only at crematoriums and burial grounds under BBMP administration and as an extension, the temporary mass cremation centres.

In among the sites visited by the AICCTU, there was no presence of an association or trade union working for the welfare and rights of the workers in the burial grounds of Muslim or Christian communities and some Hindu burial grounds even under BBMP control.

III. Health

The workers in crematoriums and burial grounds have been working under precarious conditions as has been described in the sections above. The onset of the 2nd wave of the COVID-

19 pandemic is further threatening their health and that of their families. With the exponential increase in the number of COVID-19 victims, the crematorium and burial ground workers are highly exposed to those succumbing to the disease. In their operational guidelines to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India dated 28.12.2020, crematorium workers were deemed to be 'frontline' workers eligible to be vaccinated. However, no benefits to be accrued to a frontline worker and the protection of health prescribed has been granted to these workers.

The workers in electric crematoriums who handle deceased persons by transporting them from the ambulance to the crematorium facility wear PPEs - where in some crematoriums are provided with PPE kits by the BBMP, and in some, the family of the deceased provides the PPE. Some of the workers wore masks in electric crematoriums. The worker AICCTU spoke to in Peenya Electric Crematorium only wore a disposable mask as he swept flowers, incense sticks etc. on the premises of the crematorium.

Workers in mass cremation centres wore PPEs sporadically, and only when they had to place the body of the deceased persons on the firewood. Those who were lighting the pyre did not wear any form of PPE since there was a danger of the material catching fire. However, in TR Mills crematorium none of the workers wore full-body PPE kits in either handling or cremating COVID-19 victims. As a result of not using protective gear which is fire resistant, workers have sustained burn injuries.

None of the grave-diggers wore PPEs while digging a grave nor when they would close the grave. Most of the workers stated that PPEs are uncomfortable to work in, especially while digging in the summer sun.

None of the workers were provided with sanitizer or soap solutions to maintain hygiene levels after handling of bodies of the deceased persons. Moreover, the workers living conditions are abysmal, thus ensuring not only higher risk of exposure to COVID-19, but also means that lack of basic infrastructure meant they were forced to not follow any of the safety protocol and measures prescribed.

While extreme precautionary measures have to be undertaken in handling and management of bodies of deceased COVID-19 victims, what is important is that the health of the personnel are also required to be monitored constantly. It must be noted here that there has been no action initiated by the BBMP to conduct a health assessment of the existing workers about the age group they belong to or the co-morbidities they suffer from. There have been no health camps undertaken by the BBMP or other authorities in-charge of the cemeteries to gauge the fitness and health of the workers before they are made to cremate or bury COVID-19 victims. Therefore, workers who are above 60 years of age have not been identified, and neither are workers suffering from co-morbidities such as respiratory illness, heart disease, diabetes or compromised immune systems.

These workers were considered as frontline workers by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in December 2020 and vaccinations for frontline workers started in January 2021. Despite the same, none of the workers have been provided with even a single dose of the vaccination when the AICCTU team met them. According to a news report on April 15, 2021, the BBMP chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta had instructed that the workers be vaccinated, however, this has not been implemented. Through an order dated 06.05.2021 in Writ Petition No. 6435/2020 pending before the Karnataka High Court, the Court directed the State Government to respond as to when targeted vaccination would be carried out for frontline workers such as crematorium workers. In pursuance of this order, a circular dated 06.05.2021 was issued for immediate vaccination of frontline workers and crematorium workers by the State Government. However, the same is not being carried out in reality. While, one worker in Kalpalli Hindu Crematorium stated that he got the first dose of vaccination as he is diabetic, it was because he took the initiative of getting vaccinated and not because the BBMP undertook a campaign to ensure the vaccination of all workers. Some of the workers also were afraid of taking the vaccines due to the rampant spread of misinformation on media channels and social media as well.

Except for workers in Mysore Road and Panathur electric crematoriums who reported that regular testing for COVID-19 was taking place, none of the workers were tested. The workers also stated that no one had developed symptoms so far and hence did not require to get themselves tested. Most of the workers told AICCTU that they did not need to get tested as “there is God above us who will take care of us”.

As has been detailed in the section on ‘working conditions’, the workers suffer from occupational hazards, where they suffer from back issues, burns, injuries, among other occupational hazards, the workers are not provided with health insurance either in the form of ESI, private or government health schemes. The workers themselves bear the costs of treatment, or in one case at the Panathur Electric Crematorium, the villagers bore the cost of treatment. The BBMP does not compensate the workers in case of workplace accidents or even death of the workers. At Harishchandra Ghat crematorium, when a worker passed away recently, there was no compensation paid to his family. Recently, when a worker contracted COVID-19 and was hospitalised in an ICU, a private foundation started a crowd-funding appeal to raise money for his medical treatment (*See images below*).

Additionally, while the directives prescribe that the workers must maintain hand hygiene after handling of the dead body, it must be noted that each crematorium is handling over 30 bodies of deceased persons and burial grounds are handling 15-25 bodies of deceased persons on a daily basis. Several family members request the workers to open body bags and show the face of the deceased member for the last time. While the same is permitted by the guidelines mentioned above, it also requires workers to maintain absolute measures thereafter. The same cannot be done due to the increase in workload for the workers. Therefore, not only are the workers not wearing protective equipment as prescribed, they do not have any opportunity or

infrastructural facilities for washing after handling the dead bodies either. This holds good for especially those workers who are presently employed in mass cremation centres.

Should a crematorium / burial ground worker contract COVID-19, they struggle to access the health system. Atleast 1 burial ground worker has died since he was unable to secure a hospital bed³. It is unfortunate that frontline workers who have been tirelessly working for the past year should not receive the necessary medical help on time.

Help crematorium worker Srinivas fight COVID-19







100% Raised
Rs.207,934 of Rs.100,000

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³<https://theprint.in/health/funeral-service-worker-in-bengaluru-buried-covid-bodies-but-died-waiting-for-o2-bed-himself/657708/>

Created by
Mayank Agarwal Memorial Fund

This fundraiser will benefit
Srinivas
from Bengaluru, Karnataka

Story Updates (1)

Hi everyone!
Mayank Agarwal Memorial Fund aims to raise funds for providing financial aid and food to the needy during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Until now we have helped in COVID treatment of 35 low income families by raising 18.5 lakhs.

Another low income family is the family of Srinivas (34), who is suffering from severe Covid-19 infection and is currently in the ICU. Srinivas worked in a crematorium and as a daily wage labourer in construction sites. He is the sole breadwinner for his family of 2 very small children and a pregnant wife, who was a domestic worker before she got pregnant. The family is not even able to afford for the ration let alone the ICU expense. They have spent on his treatment whatever they had and could till now, but they are still in need of a small amount of 1 lakh, which could save his life and support his family through this crisis.

We have started this fundraiser to help them out in these tough times. Our aim is to help as many people as possible. I request you to kindly contribute towards the treatment and help during this time of need. Each contribution is important!

Please help us raise this amount by clicking on the donate button and sharing this page with your friends and family.
We are grateful for your help and wishes.

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‘Infection Prevention and Control for the safe management of a dead body in the context of COVID-19’, the guidelines issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 24.03.2020, elaborates on the manner in which dead bodies of COVID-19 victims must be managed and what safety precautions must be taken by those persons who are handling such bodies. The following guidelines have been prescribed by the WHO:

1. Those tasked with placing the body in the grave, on the funeral pyre, etc., should wear gloves and wash hands with soap and water after removal of the gloves once the burial is complete.
2. Any person preparing the deceased in a community setting should wear gloves for any contact with the body. For any activity that may involve splashing of bodily fluids, eye and mouth protection (face shield or goggles and medical mask) should be worn. Clothing worn to prepare the body should be immediately removed and washed after the procedure, or an apron or gown should be worn;
3. There must be no bodily contact with the deceased and exposure to the deceased must be reduced as much as possible.
4. Children, older people (>60 years old), and anyone with underlying illnesses (such as respiratory illness, heart disease, diabetes, or compromised immune systems) should not be involved in preparing the body and must wear a medical mask to prevent contamination of the place and further transmission

5. A minimum number of people should be involved in preparations. Others may observe without touching the body at a minimum distance of 1 m;
6. Participants of a funeral should observe physical distancing at all times, plus respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene

Following the WHO guidelines, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare issued 'COVID-19: Guidelines on Dead Body Management' on 15.03.2020 and thereafter, additional guidelines have been issued by the Directorate of Health and Family Welfare Services, Government of Karnataka in its revised circular dated 29.07.2020, as has been elaborated upon in the sections above. Moreover, the WHO guidelines also provides for environmental cleaning and control as COVID-19 can remain infectious on certain kinds of surfaces for upto 9 days and that this is of paramount importance. It prescribes that surfaces be cleaned with sodium hypochlorite solution, hospital-grade disinfectants be used, etc. and that waste must be handled and disposed of properly as per legal requirements. It is obvious to state that none of these precautionary measures are being fully undertaken in any of the crematoriums or cemeteries.

As has been stated in the section on 'Living Conditions' families of workers who consist of the elderly and children live on the premises of the crematoriums and cemeteries. Thus, putting the lives of not just the workers, but that of their families at high risk.

IV. Food Security

Workers in the Christian burial ground in Kalpalli said that during the lockdown in 2020, they had received ration kits from the church and others, but this year they have received no support. The only support that the workers have received is the hot food from some NGOs. In the electric crematoriums, workers reported that they are given 3 meals a day and in some instances even refreshments. In other cemeteries like Kalpalli, they receive food once a day. Neither do families who live in the burial ground or those who live outside have received any food grains or cooked meals.

V. Living Conditions

BBMP administered crematoriums / burial grounds

The workers in the electric crematoriums designated for COVID-19 cremations, all lived on the premises of the crematorium since their workload had increased manifold. The workers in Summanahalli, Kudlu, Yelahanka, Panathur, and Kengeri live inside the crematorium, with no proper facility for resting, toilet or bathrooms. In Kengeri electric crematorium, the workers stated that since it gets too late to finish their work, they stay in the crematorium. The workers had stayed on site for anywhere between one week to more than 15 days. This was either because they lived too far away or it was too late to go home by the time they finished their work for the day. One worker lived all the way near Ghati Subramanya, and therefore could not commute to his house every day. In this crematorium, they were provided with two small rooms sufficient for two people, but during this time, it is shared by four or five workers. The workers also sleep inside the crematorium on mattresses, which they have purchased themselves. They

do not use blankets or pillows and the mattresses are worn out and use gunny-bags of rice as pillows. Here, when the workers started this job about 15 years ago, the BBMP promised them that they would take care of the housing rent for the workers, but hasn't followed-up on the promise thus far. In Kudlu and Summanahalli, the workers who hail from Doddaballapura could not commute to their homes on a daily basis, and are hence living on the premises for the time-being. A worker at Kengeri crematorium centre also shared that they face stigma back home because they are cremating COVID-19 victims and one of the workers was asked to vacate their rented house as the house-owner found out that the worker cremated COVID-19 victims.

The workers employed in several crematoriums / burial grounds are 3rd to 6th generation workers, whose families lived on the premises of the crematorium / burial ground. Although they lived on the premises, these workers and their families do not have adequate basic infrastructure such as water, electricity and sanitation.

In the Kalpalli Hindu Crematorium as well, where the workers are living on the premises of the cremation ground. They live at the centre of the premises, surrounded by the electric crematorium, fire wood crematorium, graves, and now the newly dug COVID-19 graves. The women in the families of these workers were employed as domestic workers in the nearby areas. However, once the employers learn about where the woman lives, she immediately loses her job. There is a public toilet which is used by the families for their daily ablution.

One of the workers at Peenya was allotted government land near the crematorium on which he built a house and lives with his family. While there is a family living on the premises of the Wilson Garden Hindu Burial Ground, there are two other workers who help with grave-digging, who live in the neighbourhood in rented houses.

Burial grounds operated by private trusts

In the Kalpalli Christian burial ground, the workers did not have proper running water and the workers purchase water from the nearby slum for their daily use. The Church has a pending bill of Rs. 1.5 lakh towards water consumption, which is the reason for the disconnection of water supply. Even though the workers have requested the Church to pay the bill, the Church has not paid heed to these requests and refused to pay the bill. and instead asked the workers to clear the bill if they wanted water supply. Although the Church constructed two bathrooms in the campus 3 months ago, the same have been kept locked and inaccessible to the workers living on campus. The women and children are forced to go outside in the open for their daily sanitation needs.

Figure 1: Workers cook their food outside in the Kalpalli Hindu burial grounds



Figure 2: The water connection, the bill for which has not been paid by the Church



The workers have approached the Bishop House several times and while several promises have been made by the latter, their sanitation needs have not been met. The workers have access to electricity, but they have to pay for the electricity they consume. The Church pays for the common electricity usage, but not that of the workers. Bodies of COVID-19 victims are buried right next to the place where the workers live making them vulnerable to infections.



Figure 3: The locked up bathrooms in Kalpalli Christian Cemetery

Some of the workers in Wilson Garden Hindu Burial Ground, Hosur Indian Christian burial ground, Roman Catholic - St. Patrick's and Roman Catholic - Sacred Hearts, lived on the premises of the burial ground, whereas a few other workers lived in rented houses nearby. In the Muslim Burial Grounds at Madiwala and Wilson Garden, the caretakers lived on the premises as well. The caretaker of Madiwala Muslim Burial Ground who hails from Kolkata was living with his family for the past 12 years. However, due to the low wages he received, he could not sustain his family in Bangalore and asked them to return to their home town. The caretaker of the Wilson Garden Muslim Burial Ground also lived on the premises with his family, including his wife, son and daughter-in-law. The caretaker has been employed to look after the burial ground, even though there are no new burials that take place. The son of the caretaker also helps with burials, and also works sporadically as an electrician. Even at the Jewish Burial Ground, there was a family belonging to the Muslim community which lived on the premises and took care of the graves.

It is clear that neither the BBMP crematoriums nor the privately run burial grounds have provided any housing facility or basic housing infrastructure to any of the workers employed. The workers who are struggling to make ends meet with low or no wages, do not have proper housing facilities with access to basic infrastructure such as water and sanitation facilities. The workers predominantly belong to the dalit or minority communities who unfortunately have been doing the caste-ordained jobs. It is condemnable that the authorities have treated them with such indignity through these years.

VI. Education of children of the workers

In Harishchandra Ghat, the workers said that not many children are attending school since the pandemic began and one of them felt that exposing them to display screens at such a young age is bad and therefore did not sign them up for online classes. At the Mysore Road

Some of the workers in Wilson Garden Hindu Burial Ground, Hosur Indian Christian burial ground, Roman Catholic - St. Patrick's and Roman Catholic - Sacred Hearts, lived on the premises of the burial ground, whereas a few other workers lived in rented houses nearby. In the Muslim Burial Grounds at Madiwala and Wilson Garden, the caretakers lived on the premises as well. The caretaker of Madiwala Muslim Burial Ground who hails from Kolkata was living with his family for the past 12 years. However, due to the low wages he received, he could not sustain his family in Bangalore and asked them to return to their home town. The caretaker of the Wilson Garden Muslim Burial Ground also lived on the premises with his family, including his wife, son and daughter-in-law. The caretaker has been employed to look after the burial ground, even though there are no new burials that take place. The son of the caretaker also helps with



Figure 4: Graves of COVID-19 victims right next to the homes of the workers

crematorium, some children of the workers go to private schools while some go to government schools. One of the workers' children attend school in Ragi Gudda for free of cost, while the other workers have to pay the school fee for a private school. He was told that the government will pay this fee, but this was never followed up on. At Kengeri crematorium, when the workers started this job about 15 years ago, the BBMP promised them that they would take care of the educational expenses of their children. However, the same has not been done so far.

At the Kalpalli Christian burial ground and the Hindu crematorium, the children of the workers went to a local school and the workers said that they do not want any of their children to grow up and take up their profession of grave-diggers, and hence are encouraging them to study further.

VII. On Volunteer Groups Helping with Last Rites

There are several volunteer groups helping out in the last rites of COVID-19 victims during the second wave. Some of the groups include Helping Hands, Almighty Foundation, Mercy Angels, Here I Am, among others. These volunteers are helping out at various levels, including handling helplines, picking up the bodies of the deceased persons from hospitals, shifting them into coffins, carrying them to the graves, cleaning and preparing them for last rites, and lowering them into the graves. These workers are helping in Hindu, Muslim and Christian burial grounds, and some assist in crematoriums as well. While there are large teams of 40 to 50 volunteers helping out with each of these groups and organisations, there are smaller teams of localised volunteers, who are helping out at smaller burial grounds like Shanti Nagar, Jigani, Ulsoor, etc.

The volunteers are assisting families of COVID-19 victims with the last rites, irrespective of religion (that of the volunteers or the family), they are helping out from the moment the body of the victim is released from the hospital, until the last rites are conducted, which includes transportation, rituals, and the final rites of burial or cremation. These volunteers dealt with about 15 cases every day in April 2021, and it peaked to 25 cases a day for a week. It has now been reduced to 12 cases a day. However, it is the grave diggers who dig graves and keep the graves ready for the final rites. While the volunteers help with all else, the work of digging and closing the graves are done by the workers. While some of the burial grounds have hired JCBs to do the digging, and JCBs are also hired by those choosing to bury their loved ones on other private lands, most of the burials are being done by manually digging the graves.

AICCTU was also informed by a volunteer group that there is a nexus between hospitals, ambulance drivers and the contractors or middle-men who run the crematoriums/cemeteries, who charge families exorbitantly to release the body of the deceased COVID-19 victims from the hospital, to transport them, and to bury or cremate them. The volunteers help mitigate such corruption, but are able to assist only a small number of families in this endeavor. The volunteers of Here I Am, a group started by the Bangalore Archdiocese during the first lockdown last year,

were provided with PPE kits and food by the Archdiocese. However, the group now has several sponsors who provide not only PPE kits, but also food, snacks, etc. for the volunteers. Despite the nexus of corruption which has waded through the system even in a pandemic, the workers at the burial grounds, who do the last mile work, remain unpaid, invisibilized and treated with indignity.

Recommendations

1. **Protection during burials/ cremations:** All crematorium and burial grounds workers should be provided with PPE kits - one for each burial / cremation. Masks, gloves, sanitisers and bleaching powder or hypochlorite solution for use during the digging and covering of the grave, as the case maybe.
2. **Testing:** Free testing must be conducted for all crematorium / burial grounds workers on a regular basis as per prescribed protocol. The same must be organised by the BBMP or the private trust in-charge.
3. **Vaccination:** Since all crematorium and burial ground workers must be considered as frontline workers, they must be vaccinated on priority. Along with the workers, the families of these workers who are also susceptible to contracting the disease should also be vaccinated on priority basis. Many of the families live on the premises of cemeteries and crematoriums, thus making them as vulnerable to the virus as the workers themselves.
4. **Sanitisation Initiative:** As per the recommendations and guidelines issued by various authorities in regard to dead body management, crematoriums must be sanitised everyday as per protocol. Similarly, the houses of workers living on the premises of the crematorium / burial grounds must also be sanitised.
5. **Ensure Job Security:** Regularise the services of all the workers in cemeteries and crematoriums, irrespective of whether the burial grounds or crematorium is managed by the BBMP or a private trust. All measures to secure their jobs and livelihoods must be made by the relevant authority.
6. **Wages:** At the very minimum, minimum wages of Rs. 13,132 must be paid to the workers every month. In fact, fair wages must be paid to the workers. Workers must receive full wages on or before the 7th of every month. The workers must be issued with wage slips every month, and be provided with their ESI and EPF account numbers, along with ID cards for every worker. The BBMP must ensure direct payment of wages to these workers via bank transfers. The Labour Department should ensure that those working with privately managed cemeteries also receive minimum wages and that all benefits as that of the BBMP workers are provided to them.
7. **Overtime:** There is an exponential increase in workload for the workers since there are a large number of deaths during the renewed waves of COVID-19 infection – be it COVID-19 or non-COVID-19. The workers are working above and beyond their usual working hours. The BBMP and the State Government needs to ensure that the workers are compensated for the hard labour put in by the workers.

8. **Risk Allowance:** These workers must be provided risk allowance for they are exposed to the grave risk of contracting the COVID-19 infection as they are conducting the last rites of COVID-19 victims. This must be paid over and above the wages due to them.
9. **Social Security:** Every worker in crematoriums and cemeteries must be provided with ESI and EPF facilities, and must also be provided with gratuity and pension benefits upon superannuation. Yearly bonus and incentives, and all other benefits accrued statutorily must be extended to these workers.
10. **Insurance:** These workers must be recognised as beneficiaries under the Central Government 50 lakhs insurance Scheme.
11. **Housing:** The workers live on the premises of cemeteries and crematoriums with scant resources and basic amenities. They must be provided with BBMP quarters with all basic amenities including water, electricity and sanitation.
12. A committee must be set-up to look into the working conditions of these workers. The committee will recognize that the occupation is caste-based and take concerted steps to ensure that the children of these workers have adequate access to education and employment, among other opportunities etc. The committee will make recommendations to overhaul the manner of functioning of crematoriums and cemeteries, in a manner that ensures dignity, health and wages for these workers, and enables their children to move out of the caste-based occupation. It must also look into compensation to be paid to these workers and their families for forcing them into caste-based occupation and with a view to rehabilitate these workers. The committee must consist of members from the Social Welfare Department, Labour Department, Health Department, among others.

Annexure-I

Questionnaire for crematorium/burial ground workers

Basic Information

1. Is it a private or govt owned crematorium? Which department is it under?
2. How many workers are employed in the cemetery?
3. How did you take up this occupation?
4. Who appointed you to this job?
5. How many years have you been working here?
6. Educational background

Living conditions

7. Do the workers live with their families in the cemetery?
8. Are there water and sanitation facilities? Do they need to pay for this?
9. Do they have electricity in their homes? Do they need to pay for this?
10. Do the children and youth study? If so, where?
11. Do the women seek work inside or outside the cemetery? If so, what and where?

Wages and social security - Lekha

12. What is your current wage?
13. Do you receive your full wage on time every month?
14. When was the last payment you received? How much did you receive?
15. Are the payments made through bank/cheque/cash?
16. Do you get an additional payment as digging charge?
17. If maintained by BBMP, are they provided with ESI/EPF facility?
18. Do you get any benefits from the government?
19. Do you have a Union or organisation to represent your interests? If yes, details including which organisation, from when are you part of it, what demands are raised, what are its activities etc.
20. Have you demanded for monthly wages, increase in salary, better working conditions, etc. Who did you make the demands to? When? What was their response?
21. Have you been provided with an ID card?

Burial / Cremations

22. How many burials happen everyday? How is it different from pre-April numbers?
23. What are the records maintained for burials/cremations in general?
24. Is there a separate register for COVID-19 deaths?
25. How many hours do you work in a day?

26. Is a JCB used to dig the grave or is it manually done?

Health

27. Are you given PPE, masks, gloves and sanitisers? How many? Who provides?
28. Do you use a new PPE kit during every burial?
29. Are you vaccinated? If yes, how did you get it done and where. If no, why?
30. Have you been tested for COVID-19?
31. Have any of the workers or their families been tested positive? If yes, please describe the entire experience. How did you manage to isolate / quarantine?

Food Security

32. Have you received any food relief during this lockdown?
33. Have you faced challenges in meeting your nutrition and food needs in the past few months?

Annexure-II

Summaries of information on crematoriums / burial grounds visited

I. BBMP Crematoriums

1. Kudlu Electric Crematorium

There are 8 workers presently working in the crematorium, with three workers who have been working there for the past few years (wherein one worker has been employed there for the past 20 years), and the 5 others have joined anywhere between one and three years. No payment of wages has been made for those workers who have joined one to three years ago. The three workers who have been at the crematorium for a couple of years have been issued ID cards by the BBMP and apparently get Rs. 14,000 as salary. The union has taken down a list of new workers so that payment can be made to them.

PPE kits are provided by the BBMP and also replenished. About 40 bodies are cremated here on a daily basis, whereas there were about 6 to 8 bodies that came earlier. The crematorium is open between 7.30 AM and 5.30 PM. However, this is the official working hours of the crematorium. The workers are working between 7.30 AM and 1.30 AM. The workers live on the premises of the crematorium and have not been provided with proper housing facilities. Incidentally, these workers too hail from Doddaballapura.

The workers are provided three meals a day by an NGO. The workers stated that testing was conducted a few months ago, but that there is no regular testing done. They have not been vaccinated. The workers are members of the Dr. BR Ambedkar Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, Graveyard Workers Wing.

2. Panathur Electric Crematorium

There are 6 workers here. Out of which two of them did not get a full two years of their salaries. These two workers were new employees who had joined two years ago, and they haven't received anything since. There is a worker who has been hospitalised because he burnt his hand when dealing with burning a body. The hospital costs have not been compensated by BBMP, instead, it has been funded by the village nearby. There is a social worker in the crematorium that mediates the food and any other help the nearby community has to offer. All three meals are donated by the community in Mahadevpura.

The workers here are not a part of any union and they are in the process of joining the union. As such, the demands about their salary have been communicated by the workers directly to the BBMP Commissioner, who responded that the issue will be solved and they would receive all their pending salary within this month. There is no provision of ESI or PF and nobody owns a health card as well.

Earlier, they received around 20-30 dead bodies for cremation everyday and since April 2021, the body count has doubled. When there is an excessive number of bodies to be cremated, the workers stay back on the premises of the crematorium for security purposes, they said. The ambulances and its drivers would wait with the dead bodies, until cremation is completed no matter how late it is in the night. The workers said that it has been almost a week since they went home.

3. *Kengeri Electric Crematorium*

There are a total of 10 workers in this crematorium. The crematorium is around 5 years old and these workers are currently working in a single shift. The working hours range from 7 AM to 10 PM or 12 AM depending on the number of bodies. Since it gets too late by the time they finish their work, they stay in the crematorium. The workers were staying at the crematorium between 1 week to more than 15 days. This was either because they lived too far away or it was too late to go home after finishing their work. One of the workers lived all the way near Ghati Subramanya. They are provided with 2 small rooms made for 2 people, but this is sometimes shared by around 4 or 5 ppl. The workers also sleep inside the crematorium on mattresses. These are provisions that they had to arrange for themselves. BBMP provided nothing here. They do not have blankets or pillows, they sleep on broken mattresses and use sacks of grains that are given to them by citizens as a pillow. They also get requests from ministers to move up their relative's cremation sooner. This order is sometimes given during odd hours and they have to comply.

At their home they face a stigma because they cremate COVID-19 infected bodies. A worker was told to vacate their rented house because the owner found out the worker's occupation. The workers are not compensated for their house rent or educational costs of their children. BBMP had promised them houses and education to their children ever since they started working this job for the past 15 years in different crematoriums, but none of them are delivered. The workers have no health cards and they haven't received any ESI or PF amount until now.

The union has been fighting for their jobs to be made permanent, but there has been no progress on that front. The workers stated that when they had a meeting with the former Commissioner Manjunath Prasad some time ago, he had suggested that they stay as temporary workers and earn Rs. 18,000 a month, as opposed to having their services regularised which will pay them wages of Rs. 12,000, and get Rs. 10,000 in hand after ESI and EPF deductions. The workers, however, insisted that their services be regularised. While the workers are doing the work of the permanent workers and earning a salary equivalent to that of the permanent workers, their services have not been regularised.

A family which came to perform the last rites saw the working conditions of the workers, and has been sponsoring cooked food for three meals a day. Some of the workers do not avail ration and usually survive on the grains that the citizens provide out of good deed.

4. *Summanahalli Electric Crematorium*

The crematorium was closed for maintenance, since the coil was burnt out and the doors of the crematorium were not closing fully. There are 8 workers in this crematorium. Since there is an increased workload, the workers now live in the hall of the crematorium. This is because they do not have the time to go home. Most of the workers hail from Doddaballapura and other such far away places. Before the increase of deaths, the workers used to commute between their homes and the crematorium. All the workers except 1 person belong to the SC community. There is one worker who is from the Gowda community and is a friend of one of the workers. Most of the workers hail from communities which have been traditionally engaged in this work.

The workers have not been tested for COVID-19 and none of them have developed symptoms is what they said. They have not been vaccinated either. The supervisor, Mr. Ramesh said that after a protest staged by the workers who are members of the Dr. BR Ambedkar Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, Graveyard Workers Wing, outside the CM's office, the workers were paid some money. They are currently being paid Rs. 10,500 per month. However, the additional workers do not know when they can expect any remuneration and how much they will be paid. Since they all come from the same place, they share the remuneration with each other. Mr. Ramesh also shared that the Samiti helped source workers for the Giddenahalli and Tavarekere crematoriums.

The workers said that they wear PPE kits while putting the body inside the electric crematorium and later incinerate it as means of disposal.

There is an NGO which is providing three meals a day to the workers.

5. *Peenya Electric Crematorium*

This crematorium had a two-facility incinerator, and there were 4 workers who are usually employed to run the premises. However, when the crematorium was designated to cremate COVID-19 victims from April 16th onwards, 4 additional workers were hired. The land belonged to the Peenya village where they conducted the last rites of the villagers. A part of this land has been taken by the BBMP to build the electric crematorium. The burial of the villagers is done by those from outside, and who may be belonging to the village, and the same is not done by the crematorium workers.

One of the workers we spoke to, Shri. Brijesh, lives in the vicinity of the crematorium, where the government allotted some land to him, while the others come from areas around and live in rented houses. The workers are paid Rs. 10,500 per month and do not have ESI facility. Shri. Bhyrappa said that they have not been tested for COVID-19 nor vaccinated. They are a part of the association led by Shri. Suresh. They are regularly provided PPE kits by the BBMP and they wear the same while handling the dead body. Those not handling a body do not use PPE kits nor do seem to use gloves. When we visited the crematorium, 2 workers were sweeping up flowers during the last rites, without any gloves and a simple disposable mask. After use, they

incinerate the PPE while cremating the body. They are conducting the last rites of at least 35 bodies through the day. They are working for 1 hours a day - 7.00 am to 7.00 pm.

They are provided with meals twice a day.

6. *Banashankari Electric Crematorium:*

There are 5 workers in the crematorium and all of them have been working in the crematorium for the past 30 years, including the writer. These workers helped construct the crematorium and were later asked to work as crematorium workers. They start their day at around 6 or 7 AM and it stretches through the night depending on the number of bodies for the day. Currently, they are receiving a regular salary of around Rs. 10,000. They have been told that the amount has been deducted towards their ESI and PF, but they don't know their ESI numbers, so there is no way to tell if the amount has reached their accounts. Sri. Yash, the writer, said that the ESI and EPF numbers will be given along with this month's salary.

An NGO supplies them breakfast, snacks, lunch and dinner, however this is only supplied to the crematorium and not the burial grounds which is next door. They receive about 20 to 30 bodies everyday. The workers said that since the families have to book a slot online, the number of bodies to be cremated everyday was capped at 20. However, since there are issues with digital media, where sometimes the server is down and the families cannot book a slot, they receive over 20 bodies. Since the workers cannot deny a cremation when the family has come to the crematorium, they end up doing their work.

Sri. Yash mentioned that there is a lot of hassle when the crematorium has to handle COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 deaths. They said that they can only focus on one and it becomes too hectic to handle both. Each body cremation needs all 5 workers and they divide the work amongst themselves from cleaning to ensuring the body is fully cremated. Since this crematorium uses wood fire, they cannot use PPE kit inside the cremation unit. The heat allows them to only use gloves and masks. Sri. Yash mentioned that while BBMP provides the cleaning supplies and protective equipment, it is not enough. They buy extra supplies with their own money.

None of the workers have been vaccinated. All of them got a test done once and they tested negative. However these tests are not done regularly. None of them have health cards. Sri. Yash mentioned that a lot of people get sick because of the heat and the working conditions and they are given sick leave during such times.

7. *Mysore Road Electric Crematorium*

There are about 6 workers in the crematorium. None of the workers are on permanent basis. The union of these workers are fighting for regularisation of their services. According to a worker they are supposed to receive Rs. 15,000 per month, but they instead receive Rs. 10,000. As of now, the workers are yet to be paid wages for 3 months. They were recently paid 6 months dues. When asked about the COVID-19 incentive they are supposed to receive, they were unsure of what was paid as wages, and what was paid as the incentive.

They were not aware on whether they were provided with benefits of ESI and PF as they have not been provided numbers. They also have no health cards. The workers seem unaware of the details of the demands by the union as they said that the issue of ESI, PF and health card is not demanded by the union.

The workers live outside the premises of the crematorium, and in the neighbourhood area in rented houses. All utility bills are borne by the workers themselves. Considering that they do not get their salaries on time, they tend to borrow a lot to fulfill their basic necessities. They have been receiving ration and hence managing to feed their family. At the crematorium, breakfast and lunch is provided for free by an NGO.

Some children of the workers go to private schools while some go to government schools. One of the workers' children attended school in Ragi Gudda, while the children of other workers sent their children to private schools.

Workers undergo a COVID-19 test every week here, as it is located in a BBMP ward office. However, none of them were vaccinated. None of the workers have tested positive so far. The workers also shared that they do not have infrastructure to isolate themselves in their houses if they tested positive.

8. *Yelahanka Electric Crematorium*

There are 8 workers here who've been working in the crematorium since 2006. One of the workers', Sri. Veerappa, came to work in the crematorium because his father worked here before. Their working hours are between 7 AM and 12 to 3 AM. They work in two shifts - 7 AM to 3 PM and 3 PM to 12-3 AM. They cremate 20-40 bodies everyday and their working hours depend on the number of dead bodies each day.

None of the crematorium workers have permanent jobs and they were only recently paid 12 months of their pending wages. They currently get Rs. 10,380 a month, but claim that they are supposed to get Rs. 18,000 per month. The workers raised their concerns with their jurisdictional MLA, and the MLA got in touch with the BBMP Commissioner. However, there was no follow-up thereafter on their pending wages. While the workers tried to follow-up on the same, they were forced to stop as the workload was increasing every day and they did not have the time to go from office to office for the follow-up work.

In the crematorium the workers said that they also paid for the *chattas* (stretchers made out of bamboo) for over 2,800 bodies and it cost them about Rs. 3 lakhs. They raised this amount by taking a loan and are paying Rs. 6,000 every month towards the repayment of interest. Recently, a worker called Sri. Armugam had a slip disc and was not able to attend work. The BBMP has not provided wages or any compensation towards medical treatment. When the workers approached BBMP Commissioner, he did not make any promises.

The workers have no health cards and fear that there will be many more such life threatening instances for which they would have no health insurance. They have no provision of ESI or PF and this request has been demanded by their union for the past three years. They have recently been given a COVID-19 card so that they can commute, during the lockdown restrictions.

Sri. Veerappa said that the health inspector, Sri. Lingraj, takes money from families who come to cremate their loved ones in exchange for an assurance to speed up their relative's cremation. This puts an additional stress on the workers' already overwhelming workload, for which they do not receive any compensation. Sri. Veerappa also claimed that the BBMP provides them an insufficient number of PPE kits.

Cooked food is donated by a family that had cremated one of their relatives in this crematorium. The same family had paid them Rs. 10,000 to each of the 4 workers to cremate their relative. The workers usually survive on the money given to them as largesse by the families.

9. *Wilson Garden Electric Crematorium*

This electric crematorium is not a designated crematorium for COVID-19 deaths, and all other electric crematoriums where COVID-19 victims are being cremated are diverting the non-COVID-19 deaths to this crematorium, among other similar crematoriums which are not designated for COVID-19 deaths. It has two incinerators. They are receiving about 15 to 16 dead bodies in a day. There are 3 contract workers who belong to the Tigala community and there are 5 permanent workers. The BBMP is providing them food for three meals a day. The 3 contract workers are part of the Dr. BR Ambedkar Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, Graveyard Workers Wing. The Samiti is currently attempting to negotiate for the workers to be made permanent and for their wages to be increased.

10. *Chamarajpet/TR Mills*

There are about 2-3 full time workers in the crematorium who are on the rolls of BBMP. Additional workers have been working in the 2nd wave. These workers have been brought in by Mr. Kiran who has been given the contract for supplying wood. Mr. Kiran is from the area and has been supplying wood to this crematorium for several years. There are about 25-30 workers doing cremation of both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 dead bodies. There are two separate sections for the same, and are both open air cremation. Though there are 2 sections, these are not separated in any way. There are 4 rows of slots of pyres - 2 are used for COVID-19 deaths and 2 for non-COVID-19 deaths.



Figure 4: Cremations being conducted in TR Mills

The workers were not using any form of PPE - neither gloves nor masks - as they cannot use the PPEs near fire, he said. The workers have been tested for COVID-19, but they have refused to take vaccination, Sri Kiran said. The workers have not been tested for COVID-19. The writer at the crematorium in a telephone interview said that there were no complaints from those living in the vicinity due to the continuous smoke from the pyres.

11. Kalpalli Hindu Cemetery and Crematorium

This cemetery is run by the BBMP. There are 4 places for wood cremation and 1 electric crematorium. A separate place has been allocated for burying those who have died of COVID-19. This cemetery was not used for COVID-19 deaths last year and has been opened up because of the large numbers in the past month. JCBs are used for digging the grave in case of a COVID-19 death and all other graves are dug manually. JCBs were charging Rs. 5000 for each grave. The BBMP has since announced that families do not need to pay this money and the JCB will be paid for by the BBMP.

One of the workers told us that only those with Hindu names can be buried in this cemetery. He told us that unless both the name of the deceased is Hindu and the father or husband's name is Hindu, the person will not be buried in the cemetery. Therefore a non-Hindu woman married to a Hindu man will also not find space here. On being asked if this is a BBMP order, the worker informed us that the RSS had ordered them so and that this was the practice in all cemeteries in Bengaluru.

There are 7 workers employed in this cemetery who live inside the campus with their families. Some of them are 4th- 6th generation workers, The workers have been told that their wages have been revised to Rs. 11,000 per month but they have not yet received this revised wage.

Some workers told us that they do not get paid every month, but a lump sum amount is transferred every few months. One worker said that they are paid once a year and they receive about Rs. 1 lakh. A few months ago they staged a protest seeking wages and thereafter, they were paid arrears to each worker who received an amount anywhere between Rs. 30,000 and Rs. 60,000. They are not given a calculation for the amount deposited in their accounts. One of the workers had injured his fingers, and when asked how he got the injury, he said that a stone fell on his hand while moving it during work. He said that he had to spend money on getting it treated, and that the BBMP did not help. DSS (leader's name Suresh) has formed a union of the workers in this cemetery. The children go to school and college. Some women work as domestic workers in nearby houses. But once the employers get to know where the woman leaves, she immediately loses her job.

In the past month, the cemetery has been conducting approximately 40 burials/cremations a day. Half of these are formally counted as COVID-19 deaths. However, one of the workers said that the other deaths were mostly because of heart attack. Since they died at home, there is no way of verifying as to whether they were COVID-19 deaths or not.

None of the workers and their families are vaccinated. They were given PPE kits until about a week ago. Since the BBMP has run out of stock, the workers ask the family members to provide PPE kits and only then conduct the burial. The workers work 12 hours a day from morning 7.00 am to evening 7.00 pm. If there are last rites to be conducted post 7 PM, only if the slot is pre-booked, the last rites will be conducted.

In case of cremation, the electric crematorium is used for COVID-19 deaths and not wood cremation.

12. Harishchandra Ghat Electric Crematorium

There are 4 permanent workers employed in the crematorium and they have been working here for 15 years. The work has been passed down for 3 generations. They usually come in to work at 7 AM and work until 2 AM or more depending on the number of bodies being cremated for the day. This crematorium performs the last rites of both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 deaths. They are cremating about 12 COVID-19 victims everyday. They are provided with a PPE kit by BBMP, but the kits do not come with masks and gloves. BBMP also provided pocket sized sanitizers which were extremely inadequate for the workers.

The pending salary of 6 months was given to them a week ago and they are yet to receive this month's salary. The workers stated that they are supposed to be paid Rs. 17,000 per month, but receive only Rs. 11,500. Along with that, they are supposed to be paid Rs. 1,200 for cremation of every COVID-19 body as also an incentive. They have not received the same. They are also not receiving any ESI or PF benefits, despite this being a demand from their union since 2008. The union also has been demanding a health card since 2008. There has been a non-COVID-19 related death of a worker, and another worker suffered major injury when he was pushing a trolley. The worker had a slip disc and it cost him Rs. 2 lakhs for the treatment, and the same was not compensated for by the government. On Ambedkar Jayanti, they had organised a protest outside the office of the Chief Minister, and they were promised that their back wages

would be paid. However, there has been no follow-up on the promise. The workers also stated that the members of the union met with the BBMP Commissioner once a week. But due to the pandemic, and restrictions on entry of people into the BBMP Head Office, they have not been able to raise their concerns with the Commissioner.

Cooked food is being provided by some concerned people, and the workers have not been provided with ration. The workers are the sole income generators in their family and they said that they are finding it hard to provide food for their families everyday. The workers live far from the crematorium and pay rent to their house. The workers pay for the electricity and water bills from their pockets. Not many of the children of the workers have been able to attend school since the pandemic. One of the workers feared that exposing his children to mobile or laptop screens at such a young age would impact them negatively and hence decided not to sign up his kids for online classes.

None of the workers have been vaccinated and they have only tested themselves a year ago, when the pandemic began. After that, they have not been tested.

13. *Wilson Garden Hindu Burial*

There is a family which lives on the premises of the graveyard and does the work of burial. The head of the family is the 4th generation to live in the premises and take care of the graveyard. He is assisted by his two sons. There are two other workers who help them out when there is a need. The worker is paid Rs. 1000/- a month and survives on baksheesh given by the families. During non-COVID-19 times, there were about 4 bodies a week that were being buried. But it is now 4 bodies a day, despite the burial grounds being designated for non-COVID-19 burials only. The son of the worker, Sri. Ramkumar, stated that the number of bodies have increased as there are families which do not want to wait in line for cremation and hence opt for burial. The workers here are not a part of any union. Ramkumar also said that there are not too many burials that take place in this graveyard.

II. Temporary Crematoriums Setup During the Second Wave

1. *Tavarekere Mass Cremation Centre*

At this mass cremation site, there were about 18-20 workers coming from areas within the city and were employed in other crematoriums. Suresh of the Dr. BR Ambedkar Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, Graveyard Workers Wing had organised for the workers to work at this site. The workers are being provided with three meals, coffee and snacks in the evening. Teams have been organised for the entire process - one team prepares the space, another places the body on the frame and a third team places the wood. Therefore, only the workers who place the body on the firewood wear PPEs. Payment for the workers is being negotiated by Suresh.

On the day we visited, at around 11.15, there were already 31 tokens issued for cremation. Though the capacity of the crematorium is 40, the facility cremates much more than its capacity. On the previous day 75 cremations had been conducted in Tavarekere. This means that the workers are working for very long hours. Like Giddenahalli, the workers come in the morning at 6.00 am and leave late in the night. On the previous day, the workers had left at 2.00 am.

CEO of the Panchayat, Tavarekere - Nagaveni and the tahsildar were at the site. The entire site is managed by the Panchayat. We did not speak to the workers directly, but spoke to a coordinator from the Dr. BR Ambedkar Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, Graveyard Workers Wing.

2. *Giddenahalli / Metipalya Mass Cremation Centre*

This is a mass cremation site where there are about 33 workers employed across two sites in the same premises. There are 25 slots each in the two sites, with 15 workers employed in one site and 18 workers in the other. Since there are 50 spaces in this crematorium site, only 50 cremations are conducted here. Any additional families who approach the site are directed to the Tavarekere site. The workers were previously working in Lingarajapuram and Kallapalli crematoriums and have been asked to come to work in this site by Suresh, and they are members of the Dr. BR Ambedkar Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, Graveyard Workers Wing. They commute from Lingarajapuram every morning by autos, whose charges are provided for by Suresh. They work between 6 AM to 10 PM everyday. Their wages for working in the mass cremation site is yet to be negotiated by Suresh and the workers were not aware of how much will be decided.



Figure 5: The Giddenahalli mass crematorium

These workers have not been tested for COVID-19 nor have they received any vaccination. They are being provided with food. They are provided with PPEs which they use while placing the body on the firewood. The workers shared that they are unable to light the pyre with the PPE suits on since there is a threat of it catching fire. Therefore at the time of lighting the pyre, the workers remove the PPEs. They incinerate the PPE in the pyre after use.

At the site, a revenue department officer and an officer from the Kadabagere Panchayat were present. The Panchayat manages the site.

III. Cemeteries run by Private Trusts

1. *Kalpalli Christian Cemetery*

This cemetery is privately owned by the Churches under St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral. This cemetery has 7 workers who stay inside the cemetery with their families. Most of them are 4th generation cemetery workers. They get paid Rs. 5500 per month. In addition they get Rs. 150 per grave as digging charges, while the Church charges Rs. 500 per grave. They do not receive their wages on the 1st of the month and receive it anytime between 8th and the 12th of the month. They have been told that their wage has been raised to Rs. 11,000 per month, but they have not yet received the revised wage. They do not have running water. They purchase water with their wages for cleaning and kitchen purposes. 2 bathrooms have been constructed recently but are not functional. Those who live in the cemetery go outside in the open for their daily sanitation needs and the women family members of the grave-diggers are especially inconvenienced by this. The workers have approached the Bishop House several times and while several promises have been made, no provision of water for the workers has been made. A tank has been built by the church, but they need to pay a pending bill of Rs. 1.5 lakh for the water connection, which the church is refusing to do. There is electricity, but they have to pay for the electricity used by them in their houses, while the church pays for the common electricity usage.

For the past month there has been an increase in burials at the cemetery. Earlier the daily numbers would be between 8-10, now they are burying between 18-20 bodies every day, half of which are deaths caused by COVID-19. The cemetery is conducting burials only of those whose families already have booked a space in the cemetery since there is no place for new spots, and bookings for new graves have been closed for the past three years. In the event that more than one family member has passed away in the past month all are buried in the same place. For e.g. in one week there were 3 deaths in a family. All 3 were buried in the same spot, with the workers digging up the same grave 3 times, and coffins one atop the other.

Graves are dug manually and it takes approximately 4 hours to dig one grave. With an average of 18 bodies a day, this works out to 72 hours with each of the 7 workers spending approximately 10 hours on just digging the graves. Clearly this is not possible and when we were at the cemetery, we saw that there were several more people doing the work. The workers said they were from their extended family and friends. Their work is not accounted for by those managing the cemetery and it was indicated that the salary they receive is being shared with other additional workers. Approximately 5 kgs of bleaching powder is used for each grave. The first application is once the grave is dug, second after the coffin is placed and third once the grave is covered.

During the 2020 lockdown, the families received ration twice during the entire 2 ½ month period and have received nothing this year.

None of the workers nor their family members have been vaccinated. They have also not been tested. The workers dig the grave with bare hands and stated that they mandatorily use masks and gloves while burying the bodies. They have not been provided with PPE kits.

2. *Indian Christian Cemetery, Hosur Road*

There are a total of 18 workers doing the work of grave digging. There have been about 70 cases of COVID-19 burials in the first week of May 2021. They have been working there for the past several years. Some of them have been provided with living quarters within the cemetery premises, whereas others live nearby the cemetery. They work between 6.00 am and 6.00 pm every day. Last year during the lockdown, the Church provided them with ration. They get a payment of Rs. 10,000/- per month which is given by the Church. There is no union. These workers work across the multiple graveyards in the Hosur cemetery premises, which include Indian Christian cemetery, Roman Catholic, and Protestants. There is no union of these workers. There is a general disgruntlement among the workers. One of the workers who was permanent quit his job so that he is able to do other work as well. He continues to work in the Indian Christian cemetery on and off but prefers to not work full time since concerns of the workers is not heard.

3. *St. Patrick's Cemetery*

There are no new burials in this cemetery. Only families who own sites in this cemetery are allowed to bury their family members here. Though the government has suggested that those who pass away due to COVID-19 be cremated, families are bringing their family members who pass away due to COVID-19, to this cemetery. The workers do not use PPE kits while preparing the graves or during cremation. There is a family which lives in the cemetery. We were unable to get information on the wage that the caretakers get. Another person is responsible for getting the graves dug who employs casual labour for the actual digging. Currently the cemetery sees 4 - 5 burials in a week. No one who works in the cemetery has been vaccinated.

4. *Sacred Hearts Cemetery*

There are no new burials in this cemetery. It is an old burial site, and the caretaker Sri. Pavan stated that there was no space left for burial there. Sri. Pavan has been the caretaker of this cemetery for the past several years and lives on the premises along with his family. His father used to take care of the cemetery. He stated that although they belong to the SC community, his forefathers were agricultural labourers. His father was an alcoholic and found this job, which he continues to do as he too was not interested in pursuing an education. He informed that COVID-19 related burials were happening at Gate No. 5 mostly and at Gate No. 4 that belonged to the Protestants. There were about 15-18 workers and they all worked across the various cemeteries within the premises.

5. *Muslim Burial Ground in Jamia Masjid (Madiwala)*

Javed, the caretaker of the Masjid and the graveyard has been living on the premises for the past 12 years. He is from Kolkata, West Bengal. He is paid Rs. 2,000/- per month by the Masjid authorities. He used to live with his family in the premises until very recently. But since he could not make ends meet with his earnings, he has sent his family back to Kolkata.

There are COVID-19 bodies coming for burial. There are about one or two bodies that come every other day. During non-COVID-19 times, it was one body once in a while. In the 12 years that he has worked here, Noor Mohammed said that there were two graves that were dug by machine, as they found rocks, which needed to be cut. The burial ground is owned by Jamia Masjid.

There is a grave digger who lives nearby the cemetery, and charges about Rs. 2,000/- per grave. He takes the help of another worker for the purpose. The gravedigger is summoned when a body has to be buried.

6. *Wilson Garden Muslim Burial Ground*

This burial ground belongs to the Mavallipura Masjid and is under the Wakf Board. There are no burials taking place here from a long time and the caretaker informed us that the COVID-19 burials of those belonging to the Muslim community is being done at the Mysore Burial Grounds.

There is a caretaker who lives on the premises with his family consisting of his wife, son and daughter-in-law. The son of the caretaker helps with burials, and also works sporadically as an electrician. The caretaker is not given any wage and his earnings comprise of relatives of those buried here to give him some money. He earns about Rs. 10,000 - 15,000 per month from this.

7. *Muslim Burial Ground (Padarayanapura)*

There are about 15 workers employed in this burial ground, who are conducting about 25 burials of both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 deaths. The workers live in the compound of the cemetery. The workers are not tested nor have they received vaccinations. We were unable to speak to the workers since there were burials in progress when we visited the cemetery. The administration said that they saw far more COVID-19 deaths in the 1st wave than in the 2nd wave. According to them, in the second wave there are more non-COVID-19 deaths.

8. *Khuddus Saheb Muslim Burial Ground - Nandi Durg Road*

In this burial ground, there were about 25 burials of non-COVID-19 bodies a day, whereas there were approximately 15 burials in non-COVID-19 times. There is a separate gate at which the COVID-19 burials take place. Volunteers are helping with the burials of COVID-19 victims and there were about 16 burials the previous day (05.05.2021), with the total number of burials reaching 41. The grave diggers are paid by the Khuddus Masjid, whereas the volunteers are doing free labour. The administration said that there were more non-COVID-19 deaths and one of the reasons was that there is a lot of fear among the people who have other illnesses. For e.g., those with heart conditions, diabetes etc. are worried that should they need to access the hospital for their illness, they will not receive treatment since they are preoccupied with COVID-19 patients.

We also spoke to 3 workers who work at the burial ground. They are all part of the same family. The burial ground is run by the Khuddus Saheb Trust. There are 8 workers for COVID-

19 deaths and 40 workers for non COVID-19 deaths. The workers receive daily wage of Rs. 400 – 500 per day. Additionally, they receive Rs. 50-100 from the families of the deceased. They do not receive ESI or PF. Water and toilets are provided at the burial ground for use of the workers. They work for 8 hours a day.

JCB is used for digging graves for COVID-19 deaths, while the others are done manually. Those doing COVID-19 deaths are provided with PPEs, masks and gloves by the Trust. The workers are tested for COVID-19.

The workers we spoke with reported that they live in rented accommodation outside the burial ground with their families.

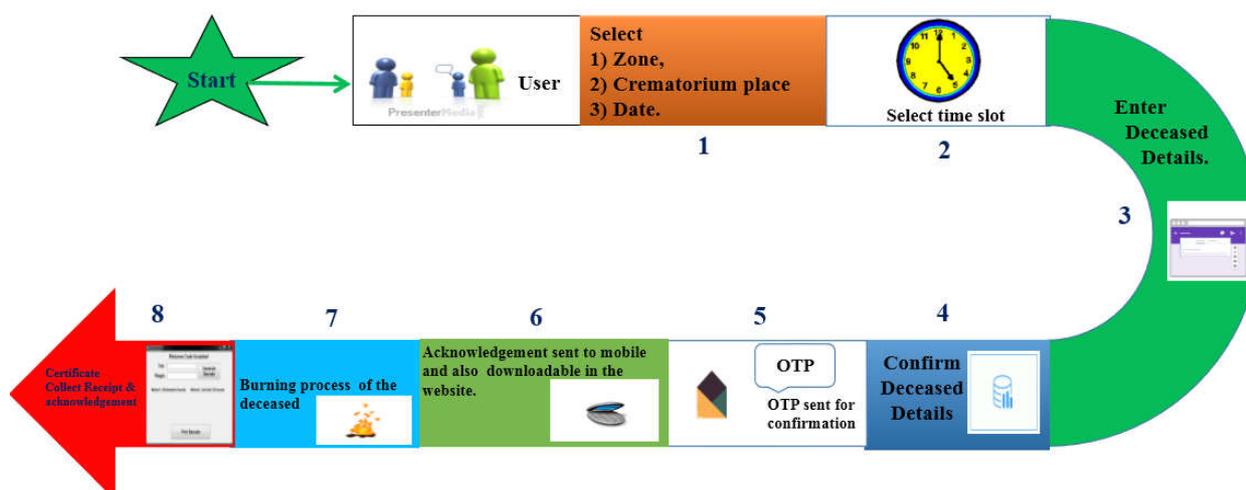
Annexure III

The Role of BBMP

Electric crematoriums are administered by the Electrical Department of the BBMP, while cemeteries are under the charge of the Chief Health Officer located in each of the BBMP zonal offices. Muslim burial grounds are broadly under the control of the Waqf Board, but day-to-day administration is handled by the Masjid that the graveyard is attached to. In the case of Christian cemeteries, the Archbishop's office is in charge of all graveyards in the city. Some graveyards are also associated with some churches.

The BBMP had mandated the following process for cremations in electric crematoriums before the pandemic.

PROCESS FLOW--HOW IT HAPPENS



Since the pandemic, a distinction is made between COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 deaths. COVID-19 deaths are to be treated differently and are to follow certain protocols. To reserve a slot for cremations of COVID-19 victims, the family needs to reserve a slot by calling a designated phone. However, workers have reported that people do not know about this and end up coming directly to the crematorium. Due to the sensitive nature of the situation, families are not turned away and are cremated even if they have not done prior registration⁴. The state government had mandated the crematoriums would be under the watch of the BBMP marshals⁵. However, during our visits to the crematoriums / cemeteries we did not see marshals at any of them.

In this context it is necessary to highlight that the provision and maintenance of adequate crematoriums and burial grounds is an obligatory function of the BBMP under the provisions of the Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act, 1976.

⁴ <https://www.deccanherald.com/city/at-bengaluru-crematoriums-walk-in-covid-fatalities-outnumber-mapped-bodies-981758.html>

⁵ Vide Circular dated 25.04.2021 referred above

The Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act, 1976 ('KMC Act') makes it an obligatory function of the corporations to maintain, change and regulate places for the disposal of the dead and the provision of new places for disposing unclaimed dead bodies (Section 58, sub-section 9) and also to maintain an ambulance service to convey dead bodies to crematoriums (Section 58, sub-section 11). Sections 391 to 400 of the KMC Act deals with disposal of dead bodies. It mandates that prior permission must be taken from the Commissioner to open or use a new place for the disposal of the dead, whether public or private. The person having control of a public or private crematorium or burial ground shall provide information of every burial, burning or any other form of disposal of a dead body. The Act also provides that grave-diggers shall hold licenses issued by the Commissioner to carry out the disposal of dead bodies. The statute also contains a prohibition against use of burial and burning grounds dangerous to health or overcrowded with graves.

However, on 21.12.2020, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike Act, 2020 replaced the Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act, 1976 for the apparent purpose of decentralised governance of Bengaluru city. In this new Act, Section 107 read with Entry A(xiv) and Entry C(xii) of the First Schedule deals with the management of burial grounds and crematoriums in the city.

While Section 107 deals with the powers and functions of the corporation, the First Schedule enumerates the 'core functions' of the corporation, in which establishment and maintenance of burial and burning grounds, cremations, cremation grounds and electric crematoriums comes within its ambit (Entry A(xiv)), whereas Entry C (xii) of the First Schedule dealing with relief activities include setting up of crematoriums, burial grounds among other functions.

These sections unequivocally mandate as a core function of the BBMP the management and maintenance of the crematoriums and cemeteries that come under the jurisdiction of the BBMP. Needless to add, it is the duty of the BBMP to ensure just and legal working conditions for the workers and ensure their rights are not violated.

Annexure IV

State Government Circulars/Notification/Guidelines

The government has dealt with the spikes in deaths by issuing a number of circulars and orders dealing with disposal of dead bodies. While including, and rightly so, a number of provisions for the benefit of the family of the deceased as well as in the interest of safety, the drastically changed circumstances of the workers have not been accounted for whatsoever.

Below, details of some of the relevant guidelines, circulars and orders are laid down:

1. As early as 15.03.2020, the Government of India released “COVID-19: Guidelines on Dead Body Management”. These Guidelines noted that crematorium/ burial Ground staff should be sensitized that COVID 19 does not pose additional risk, but staff would practice standard precautions of hand hygiene, use of masks and gloves. It was also stated that funeral/ burial staff and family members should perform hand hygiene after cremation/ burial.
2. On 17.04.2020, the Directorate of Health and Family Welfare Services, Government of Karnataka issued a Circular regarding operational guidelines for disposal of suspected/ confirmed cases of COVID-19 dead bodies directing graves of at least 8 feet. The trenches and all surfaces are required to be treated with Sodium Hypochlorite (1% solution) daily. Total area of graveyard to be sprayed with disinfectant twice daily.
3. The Karnataka State Board of Auqaf issued an Order dated 16.07.2020 mandating that Muslim Khabristans shall not refuse burial of COVID-19 death Muslims.
4. Thereafter, vide Protocol dated 17.07.2020, BBMP mandated provision of PPE by Zonal BBMP officers to all crematorium / burial ground staff. The Protocol further states that *“All crematoriums / burial grounds in Bengaluru city should accept dead bodies of Covid 19 victims compulsorily irrespective of zone in which the patient resided. The crematoriums / burial grounds in Bengaluru city are hereby directed to function from 9 AM till 8 PM everyday till further orders.”*
5. Directorate of Health and Family Welfare Services, Government of Karnataka issued a revised circular dated 29.07.2020 stating that the hasty disposal of a dead body of COVID-19 person should be strictly avoided. The circular also provides for instructions to those working in crematoriums and burial grounds as to safety protocols to be followed. However, it fails to make any reference to the increased workload of crematorium workers, nor the payment of wages, bonus, risk allowance or other benefits. The statement in this circular that “Safety and well-being of everyone who attends to dead bodies should be the first priority” appears to be a mere lip-service without any substantial clauses to ensure fulfilment of the intent.
6. A third version of the circular was issued by the Directorate of Health and Family Welfare Services, Government of Karnataka on 06.08.2020, which insofar as crematoriums and burial grounds is practically identical to the 29.07.2020 revised circular. However, here, those placing the body in the grave, on the funeral pyre, etcare required to wear full PPE kit.

7. The Government of Karnataka also issued an Order dated 21.04.2021 permitting cremation/burial of COVID-19 bodies on lands belonging to relatives of the deceased subject to compliance with norms.
8. The BBMP Commissioner issued an order dated 23.04.2021 appointing Nodal Officers for each of the crematoriums identified to perform the last rites of COVID-19 victims. In addition to this, the order also prescribed that the Nodal Officers shall report to the jurisdictional Joint Commissioner and Special Commissioner (Admin/Health) regarding the following-
 - i. To ensure availability of masks, sanitisers, PPE kits and other essential equipment in electric crematoriums
 - ii. To maintain details of dead bodies in electric crematoriums
 - iii. To ensure cremation of dead bodies as per prescribed COVID-19 protocol at these electric crematoriums
 - iv. To provide opportunity for all dead bodies to be cremated
 - v. To ensure no crowding at the electric crematoriums and that physical distancing is maintained
9. Most recently, the BBMP issued a Circular dated 25.04.2021 declaring 7 crematoriums as exclusive COVID-19 Crematoriums, reserved for bodies from BBMP hearses. Per this circular walk-ins are not permitted, and online registrations for these crematoriums are also disabled. Walk-ins for cremation of COVID-19 deaths, will be sent to any of 5 other specified crematoriums. The Circular mandates all operators in crematorium to wear PPE kits compulsorily. The circular further mandates that BBMP Marshals are to take over access control of the 7 crematoriums. Marshals are to ensure that all operators in the crematoriums wear PPE kit compulsorily and must share photos of this with the Chief Marshal officer. The Marshals must not leave the crematorium till the last of the bodies of the day are cremated.
10. Vide Office Order dated 28.04.2021, the BBMP stated that it has identified 23 sites which spans over 230 acres and 25 gunta land to perform the last rites of COVID-19 victims, The same will be reserved as per K'taka Land Revenue Act and will be transferred to BBMP.

Even a preliminary glance at the above documents makes it clear that the issue of disposal of dead bodies has been dealt with from the perspective of the non-transmission of COVID-19. Moreover, the nature of COVID-19 itself has resulted in these precautions imposing additional time-consuming responsibilities on the workers including repeated sanitisation and careful handling