

# Crematoria, graveyard staff rue lack of pay

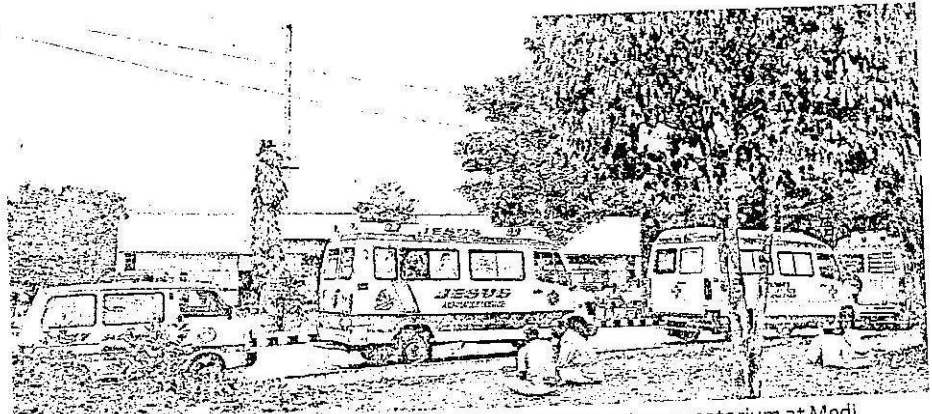
## The absence of PPE kits is another cause for concern for these frontline workers who confronted the CM on Wednesday

STAFF REPORTER  
BENGALURU

As the second wave of COVID-19 continues, recognition has dimmed for a section of frontline workers who play a crucial role in these tragic times: staff at the crematoria and graveyards.

With the death toll mounting, their work has doubled. But hopes of being paid remain just that. They have alleged that most of them haven't been paid for a year or longer, a grouse that prompted them and organisations supporting them to confront the Chief Minister near Vidhana Soudha on Wednesday.

Ironically, around 148 gravediggers and electric crematorium assistants had, last year, pledged one month's salary, adding up to ₹20.72 lakh, to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. "That was probably the last month many of them got paid," alleged A. Suresh, secretary, Ambedkar



Ambulances carrying bodies of COVID-19 victims wait in queue at a crematorium at Medi Agrahara in Yelahanka. ■SUCHAKARA JAIN

Dalit Sangharsh Samiti.

Ravi N., a worker at the Sumanahalli crematorium and general secretary of the Rudrabhoomi Naukarara Ghataka, said five crematoria were taking in bodies of patients who succumbed to COVID-19. "Workers in Rajarajeshwarinagar zone haven't been paid for three months. In the south zone, it's been as

long as 10 months, in the West nine months and in Dasarahalli and Yelahanka, 15 months. The government keeps making false assurances," he said.

It was only in 2018, after a long struggle, that the BBMP started paying them ₹14,000 per month. According to workers, this was less than the ₹17,000 that the BBMP

had initially announced in 2017. Many alleged that when they finally got paid, it was only around ₹10,500, which has also stopped.

No PPE kits Safety is the other big concern. It was only after nearly a month since the first COVID-19 case was reported in the city that all the electric

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RAVIN.,  
general secretary,  
Rudrabhoomi Naukarara Ghataka

crematoriums in the city were supplied with four Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) suits to protect those assisting the final rites of COVID-19 victims from contracting the infection.

"When the pandemic began, they gave us PPE kits. Now, there's nothing. Bodies are increasing gradually. Last year, for three months, we didn't go home. Now it's coming back to the same plight as there's a night cur-

few and it's too late to go back home.

"We are performing the last rights for up to 25 bodies. Even the sanitisers to be kept at the crematorium are not enough, and we end up getting abused by people. We are pained due to the lack of recognition," said Mr. Ravi.

Mr. Suresh raised the need for workers to be vaccinated. "Frontline workers have been vaccinated, but no such thought has gone in for these workers, who handle COVID-19 fatalities day in and day out," he said.

P. Rajendra Cholan, Special Commissioner (Health), BBMP told *The Hindu* that 'technical issues' was the reason for non-payment of salaries for a few months.

"The Commissioner called for a meeting and the issues have been sorted out. They will receive their salaries in 24 hours," he said on Wednesday evening.