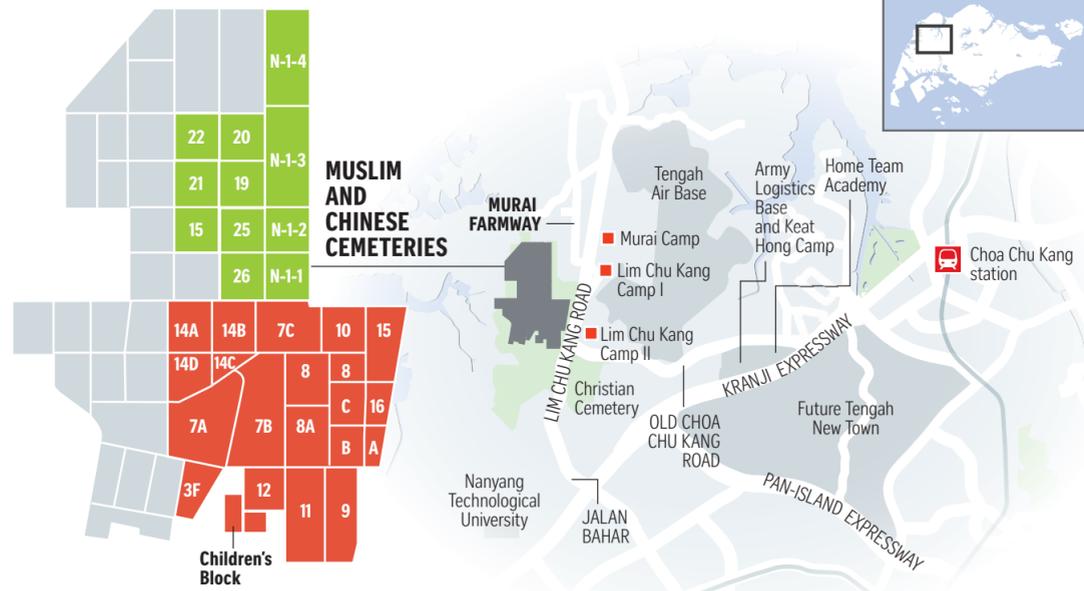


# How graves are exhumed

About 80,000 graves, of which 45,000 are Chinese and 35,000 are Muslim graves, will be exhumed in phases to make way for the expansion of Tengah Air Base. It will accommodate the relocation of Paya Lebar Air Base, which will be completed from 2030.

Armed with various tools, workers spend up to three hours to get through the soil in a Chinese grave exhumation, but once the gravedigger gets in the coffin, it is just bare hands. The gravedigger's hands are recognised as the only tools delicate and thorough enough to retrieve the bones. As for Muslim grave exhumation, a new interment system was introduced in 2007 where concrete crypts are built below ground to save space. It allows the bodies interred to be arranged in a more compact way than traditional earth plots. AskStart takes a look at how these exhumations are carried out.



NOTE: Muslim graves not on map above at blocks 6, 8, 9, 19 and 20 will also be exhumed from Sept 26 next year. Part of block 7 will be affected.

## TAOIST/BUDDHIST

### 1 PREPARATION

- An auspicious time and date for exhuming are selected by a fengshui master based on the "yin" period of time.
- The priest or fengshui master knocks on the tombstone to rouse the dead and inform them that they will be moved (below). The relatives will face away from the grave as this is happening.



### 2 EXECUTION

- After setting up a generator and lights on the side, workers dig through the soil using power drills.
- Once they reach the coffin, the gravedigger uses a saw to cut an opening.
- The gravedigger uses his bare hands to retrieve the human remains and jewellery (if any).
- The gravedigger and team rinse the bones with rice wine or antiseptic (right). He puts the bones in a white bag, and ties it with an identification tag.



Family members (top, left three) and a fengshui master (top right) witnessing the remains being washed with rice wine by a gravedigger and his assistant.

### 3 FINAL PROCESS

- A family member has to hold the bag of remains while being shielded with a wood and paper umbrella (below), and he hands the remains over for cremation.
- The remains will later be handed to the National Environment Agency for cremation and then placed in a niche.



#### Tools used by:

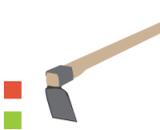
Chinese (red square), Muslim (green square)



**Wire cutter**  
Cuts structural wires within the tomb and the floor.



**Shovel**  
Digs the soil and leftover debris.



**Short changkul**  
Digs with more precision when reaching the coffin.



**Long changkul**  
Digs the top part of the soil.



**Flexible hammer**  
Hits the tombstone with less impact compared with a normal hammer.



**Long drill insert**  
Drills through the ground about 1m to 2m deep.



**Drill motor**  
Allows for various drill inserts depending on depth and material to be drilled.



**Chainsaw**  
Cuts an opening in the coffin for remains to be retrieved.



**Wheelbarrow**  
Transports the debris and the soil away from exhumation site.

## Muslim



Family members witnessing the reburial and saying their prayers before a grass-covered concrete lid is used to seal the grave.

### 1 PREPARATION

- If a family claims the deceased, the remains of eight people are gathered to be buried together in one grave. If unclaimed, 16 will be buried in one instead.
- After eight names of the deceased are gathered, their block number will be registered with the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Muis). A date and time are given by Muis a few months before the exhumation.

### 2 EXECUTION

- Family members gather in front of the grave. The gravedigger starts digging. When he reaches the bones, he asks for permission to collect the remains.
- The gravedigger is provided with a fresh piece of white linen for the remains to be placed on.

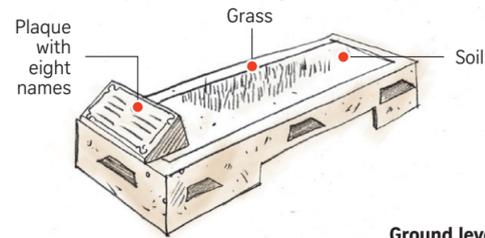
- The remains wrapped in white linen are sent to a station set up nearby to be cleaned, and are tied up and placed with the other seven remains.
- After shrouds are placed in the grave, it is covered with soil. A religious man, the ustaz, recites verses from the Quran and family members pray along with him.

### 3 FINAL PROCESS

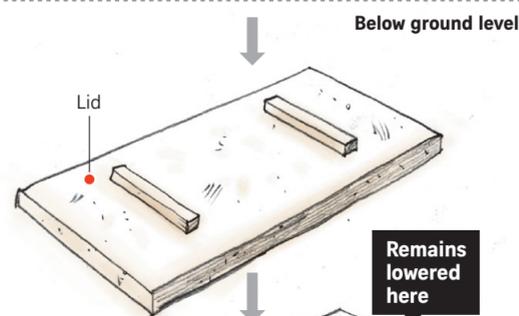
- The remains are lowered into the grave and covered with soil before a grass-covered concrete lid is used to seal the grave. A plaque with names of all the deceased will be placed on top of the grave.

### New burial system

- Saves space with graves spaced 15cm apart, separated by thin concrete slabs.
- The area surrounding the grave will be flat and covered with grass, which makes it easier for people attending burial ceremonies. Previously, people had to trek through mud in rainy weather.



Ground level



Below ground level

