

Dossier on Recent Events in Auroville

July to December 2021 (Including 27 appendixes)



ASTHA - Auroville

Aurovilians Standing for Truth, Harmony & Action



Dossier on recent events in Auroville with 27 Appendixes (and a short video)

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Timeline of Events in Auroville since July 2021

Early July 2021	Assuming Office as Secretary, Auroville Foundation Dr. Jayanti Ravi arrives in Auroville and assumes office as Secretary, Auroville Foundation.
Jul 31	380 people’s participation in Crown Walk being misrepresented as ‘support’ Dr. Jayanti Ravi organises a Crown Walk, in which 380 members participate as a gesture of goodwill. This is later misquoted by the ATDC as “having 380 people supporting us and the plan”.
Aug 1	450 Aurovilians sign a Statement on the City, clarifying misconceptions Meetings are held of people directly affected by the currently imposed Crown Way. 450 Aurovilians issue their Statement on the City, calling for unity, adaptability, and rejecting dogmatic stands. ⇒ Appendix 1
Aug 4-6	A series of meetings at Crown locations & Survey of trees and buildings likely to be affected.
Aug 18	JCBs clear a 30-metre wide path in the pretext of surveying On being questioned, Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC) retreat, admitting their mistake
Sep-Oct	Meeting in Youth Centre to discuss the survey results. Series of meetings of affected communities with members of ATDC
Sep 30	Residents publish their Questions & Concerns addressed to ATDC 120 Aurovilians publish an open letter with a detailed list of questions and concerns regarding ATDC around issues of framework, professionalism, values & ethics. In its answer, ATDC misrepresents the points in the statement, and brushes aside its constructive suggestions. ⇒ Appendix 2
Oct 7	Darkali community members present an alternative proposal for the Crown Way passing through Darkali Forest ⇒ Appendix 3
Oct 23	The Evolving Galaxy group writes to the Auroville Governing Board In their statement, this group of 49 signatories calls for a genuine dialogue towards the finalisation of Auroville’s Master Plan , and for an environmental audit. ⇒ Appendix 4
Nov 2	First meeting of the new Auroville Governing Board, held in Auroville Minutes of the meeting can be found here .

Nov 10	<p>Auroville Urban Planner, Suhasini Ayer, receives the Green Solutions Award at the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow</p> <p>⇒ Appendix 5</p>
Nov 24	<p>The Ministry of Education’s UNESCO cell writes to Auroville Foundation regarding preservation of Auroville’s Archaeological Heritage</p> <p>⇒ Appendix 6</p>
Dec 2-3	<p>Youth Centre & Bliss Forest members receive an email from ATDC informing that the work on clearing the 16.7m ‘Right of Way’ will begin ‘next week’. Youth Centre responds requesting some time, and summarises their many efforts to propose alternative options, culminating in a positive meeting at Sri Aurobindo International Institute for Educational Research (SAIHER).</p> <p>Youth Centre sends a letter of protest to ATDC</p> <p>⇒ Appendix 7</p> <p>FAMC releases a statement on Auroville Foundation’s lack of transparency regarding finances</p> <p>FAMC publishes an open statement about breach of procedure & lack of transparency by Auroville Foundation on the Rs. 51 crores special budget for infrastructure development.</p> <p>⇒ Appendix 8</p>
Dec 4	<p>Bulldozers uproot trees at Bliss Forest without work order; Auroville Foundation calls the police when the residents protest; the police leave the site on listening to the residents’ explanation</p> <p>‘Auroville Road Service’ bulldozers arrive at Bliss Forest and, without any Work Order, start uprooting trees (pictures and video here). They are accompanied by ATDC members and a few Aurovilians. The caretakers try to block the work and call out for help, and more than a hundred Aurovilians rush to the site. The Auroville Foundation calls the police, but after listening to the residents and finding that this is an internal matter, not a law-and-order issue, the police leave the site.</p> <p>Three Resident Assembly Decisions (RADs) are agreed to be pursued</p> <p>Residents reach out to the Working Committee and the ATDC for explanation and gather to decide on a way forward. Three future Residents Assembly Decision-making meetings (RADs) are agreed upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RAD 1: Request the halt of all further development until an RAD decision is made. ● RAD 2: Request the immediate resignation of Working Committee members Anu, Srimoyi, and Arun. ● RAD 3: Request the resignation of all ATDC members. <p>A late-night meeting takes place at the Auroville Foundation office, in front of which three bulldozers and diggers are spotted.</p>

<p>Dec 5</p>	<p>Bulldozers enter and uproot trees at Youth Centre at midnight; entry of residents blocked</p> <p>At 1:00 am, bulldozers leave the Auroville Foundation office with members of the ATDC, escorted by police officers, and head to Bliss Forest to complete their work of uprooting trees in the middle of the night, the time and day when Sri Aurobindo left his body. Youth Centre residents rush to stop their advance. More police had already blocked all access points to stop other residents from reaching Youth Centre. The police arrest some Aurovilian teenagers, including a girl, and seize mobile phones. A few dozen Aurovilians manage to reach the site through the forest, some assaulted by the police as they do. The arrested youth are eventually released. Two members of the Working Committee arrive on site.</p> <p>Residents Assembly meets and gathers 500 signatures for a resolution to stop work immediately</p> <p>At 3:00 pm, shocked community members gather at Kalabhumi amphitheatre to discuss the events of the day; they decide this behaviour cannot be accepted in Auroville and pass a resolution with 500 signatures on it. This is communicated to the Auroville Foundation and the working groups.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“If the community process is not followed then it sets an example moving forward that you cannot come back from. We will not let our governing system break down because of ultimatums. Auroville is a place ‘where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony, above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realise human unity.’ As a member of the Auroville community, I cherish these values and the work we have to do together, whatever the challenges. I reject violence, threats & actions which undermine community processes and our collective work.”</p> <p>Auroville International Board issues a Statement of Support to residents</p> <p>The Auroville International Board (AVI Centres) sends a statement to the Working Committee and the Secretary of Auroville Foundation in support of the community.</p> <p>⇒ Appendix 9</p>
<p>Dec 6</p>	<p>Secretary’s offer to Youth Centre is accepted on some promises, which will not be fulfilled</p> <p>At 6:00 pm, five Aurovilians meet with the Secretary at the Matrimandir. She offers Rs.10 lakh to Youth Centre and the possibility of relocating the buildings in the Bliss Forest if Youth Centre and the rest of the community step aside. They are told they must respond by 7 am the following morning. Youth Centre members call an emergency meeting to discuss the offer. The youth accept to collaborate under some conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * They will dismantle the buildings themselves; * They decline the financial compensation; * ATDC should provide a signed ‘No Objection Certificate’ within 48 hours to allow the construction of the new buildings in the same area. <p>Although this decision does not align with the longstanding RAD process (i.e. stewards cannot take such decisions without consulting the whole community), the members of Youth Centre feel they had no choice. A written response is sent within the required timeframe to the Secretary and the ATDC.</p>

	<p>Villupuram MP calls on Tamil Nadu Chief Minister to safeguard peace in Auroville ⇒ Appendix 10</p>
Dec 7	<p>The Youth Centre continues to wait for a written agreement signed by the Secretary. A spontaneous meeting is held with the wider community at Youth Centre. During the meeting, ATDC sends a message which differs from the original agreed terms.</p> <p>Outreach Media is instructed not to issue any statement to the press By noon, the Auroville Foundation instructs the Outreach Media (Auroville’s service that facilitates external media relations on behalf of the community) to not issue any statement until further notice. Auroville Foundation appoints two official spokespersons without seeking any approval from the residents.</p> <p>Darkali presents alternative Crown Road plan Darkali stewards present to ATDC their proposal to develop the land in an ecologically sensitive manner.</p> <p>S.M., member of the Working Committee, publishes a personal statement of protest against recent events. ⇒ Appendix 11</p> <p>Aurovilian A.T. sends a letter of protest to ATDC & Working Committee. ⇒ Appendix 12</p>
Dec 8	<p>Emergency RAD is refused by Working Committee The RA asks the Working Committee to organise an emergency RAD which is refused by the majority (four) of the members, against two who were in favour of it.</p> <p>Bliss Forest presents alternative Crown Road plan Bliss Forest stewards present an alternative proposal to ATDC for a more ecologically sensitive development.</p> <p>Outreach Media protests appointment of biased spokespersons by the Foundation Auroville Outreach Media writes to Auroville Foundation questioning the suppression of freedom of speech, and the appointment of biased spokespersons for Auroville. ⇒ Appendix 13</p> <p>Seven Aurovilians ask Auroville Foundation to pause Crown Way development respecting the Resident Assembly process ⇒ Appendix 14</p>
Dec 9	<p>Bulldozers accompanied by 100 strangers and TDC members pull down Youth Centre structures; some cause aggression on Aurovilians At 7:00 am, more than 100 unidentified people, allegedly hired by an Aurovilian under the order of the Auroville Foundation, enter the YC with two bulldozers, once again without a Work Order. Ignoring their requests, the paid crowd and machines forcefully enter and start destroying infrastructure, bulldozing trees and buildings. Aurovilians are manhandled</p>

	<p>(see short video here). Rampant destruction continues despite all efforts to peacefully deal with the situation. Finally, residents from different communities of Auroville come together. Holding hands, they silently bear witness. Within two hours, more buildings were taken down than had earlier been discussed.</p> <p>Residents protest peacefully, stopping bulldozers on their way to Darkali While some residents attend a meeting at the Unity Pavilion called by the Auroville Foundation, bulldozers, driven by people from a distant village (not direct neighbours of Auroville), make their way towards Darkali Forest. The sudden arrival of bulldozers causes a chaotic situation as Aurovilians and concerned people try to stop them without using violence. After some confrontations, the situation evolves into a peaceful sit-down protest (see short video here), as people chant and refuse to budge. They are informed that the following morning, bulldozing will resume at Darkali. Peaceful protesters continue to camp at the site overnight.</p> <p>Aurovilians report having received threats of arrests and, for non-Indians, deportation, if they obstruct the bulldozers.</p> <p>Former IAC members write to GB Chairperson expressing concern Former IAC members send a collective statement to the Chairman of the GB, sharing their deep admiration for Auroville and their equally deep concern regarding the unfolding events. ⇒ Appendix 15</p> <p>An Aurovillian publishes a personal statement on her experience of the day's event ⇒ Appendix 16</p> <p>Interview of Frederick, one of Auroville's most senior residents, on AurovilleRadio.</p>
Dec 10	<p>Residents protest silently and bear witness to the destruction Four bulldozers, along with ARS and members of ATDC arrive in Darkali. They start bulldozing work, while Auroville residents protest silently. A bulldozer heads along the ATDC indicated path towards a precious water catchment, and a few Aurovilians stop it. Bulldozers start the work on the other side of Darkali Forest. Concerned residents rush to the site.</p> <p>National Green Tribunal issues a Stay Order until Dec 17 A Stay Order is obtained from the National Green Tribunal, Southern Zone Bench, which orders that the felling of trees must stop until 17 December. ⇒ Appendix 17</p> <p>12 former senior officials, activists and environmentalists write to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister calling for his intervention ⇒ Appendix 18</p> <p>H.L., member of the Working Committee, publishes a personal statement of protest. ⇒ Appendix 19</p>

Dec 11	<p>International Advisory Council writes to the Governing Board expressing concern Auroville’s International Advisory Council writes to the Governing Board expressing concern on recent events and calling for inclusiveness and collaboration, as well as for an environmental audit.</p> <p>⇒ Appendix 20</p>
Dec 12	<p>Dr. Jayanti Ravi holds a meeting with members of the Golden Chain Fraternity (alumni of the Ashram School in Pondicherry) and presents the plan for building the Auroville city. While narrating the events of the week, she calls the paid force that accompanied the JCBs, “volunteers”; a few voices of dissent from the audience are suppressed.</p> <p>G.B., an expert on Auroville’s water resources and watershed management, issues an important note highlighting the dangers of ill-considered town plans.</p> <p>⇒ Appendix 21</p>
Dec 15	<p>C.G., a member of the Working Committee, publishes a personal statement of protest.</p> <p>⇒ Appendix 22</p>
Dec 17	<p>National Green Tribunal, Southern Zone Bench, extends its stay order until Dec 21st</p>
Dec 20	<p>A Resident Assembly Meeting is called to decide on the following proposed resolution:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“Stop all development work on the Crown until further notice of the Resident Assembly.”</p> <p>The three-hour-long meeting ends with a massive show of hands in favour of the resolution.</p>
Dec 21	<p>National Green Tribunal, Southern Zone Bench, extends its stay order until January 3rd.</p>
Dec 22	<p>Statement of support by Vikalp Sangam Vikalp Sangam, a consortium of 82 environmental and social bodies from across India, issues a statement calling for Auroville to remain free to continue its experiments on sustainability and harmony.</p> <p>⇒ Appendix 23</p>
Dec 23	<p>An experienced Aurovilian challenges misrepresentations made by ATDC in the Residents’ Assembly meeting of December 20.</p> <p>⇒ Appendix 24</p>

- [Appendix 25](#) is a note on the **Bioregion of Auroville**
- [Appendix 26](#) is a report on **ABDA — Auroville Bio-regional Development Activities**
- [Appendix 27](#) is a collection of a few recent **press articles**.
- Watch a short video (1½ minutes) on the aggression on Aurovilians and their peaceful response on December 5 & 9 [here](#).
- [This playlist](#) contains more **videos on recent events**.

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A statement by Aurovilians on the “city”, August 1st, 2021

“Auroville: ... At last a place where nothing will have the right to impose itself as the exclusive truth.”

— Mother, February 1968

In recent times, Aurovilians have been under heavy pressure to accept without discussion the “Galaxy” concept as “Mother’s plan” for the future city, beginning with the making of a perfectly circular “Crown Road”. We firmly object to these pressures which, in our view, put Auroville’s future in jeopardy.

There are some alarming misconceptions at work, which we would like to respond to:

1. The Galaxy

- It is true that the Mother gave her Blessings to the "Galaxy" concept for the city presented to her by a team of architects, but there is nothing to indicate that She ever considered this particular concept as sacrosanct or carved in stone for all time to come. She referred to it as “one of the projects” (*Mother’s Agenda*, 20 April 1968).
- The Charter was *not* written “for the Galaxy” concept, as was recently asserted. The Charter (which does not even contain the word “city”) has nothing to do with any architectural plan and belongs to a much higher plane of consciousness.
- In countless conversations with Aurovilians or with disciples, Mother hardly ever mentioned the Galaxy concept. But She did constantly stress the need for unity, harmony, and a change of consciousness that will replace the rigid rule of the mind. Again and again She warned against dogmatic views, especially those asserted in her name; and it is clear that six decades later, we have not learned those lessons.

2. The “Crown Road”

- Yesterday, a “walk” was organized to study issues facing the road, but ended up using callous means (such as destruction of fences, clearing a rich understory of bushes, etc.). Several Aurovilians living in the area concerned, some of them born in Auroville, were called “encroachers”. These strong-arm tactics are misplaced in Auroville.
- We consider it irrational to insist on perfect circularity for the Crown Road, as though Auroville’s future depended on an abstract line. The Crown is one element of the Auroville Master Plan (Perspective Plan 2025) but it is clearly stated on page 9 - section 1.1.2 : “The Master Plan (Perspective 2025) provides a policy framework which will serve as a guide in the preparation of the five-year development plans and annual plans for implementation of the proposals.”. And nowhere in the aforementioned document is it stated that the crown is a perfectly circular road.
- The Crown Road and the Master Plan have never been approved by Mother, as some people have erroneously stated in recent meetings.

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3. What “city”?

- We all agree that Auroville must grow into a city. But there are many conceptions for a city, especially in today’s world which is so radically different from what it was fifty years ago. Mother’s vision was always an evolving one, as any cursory reading of her numerous notes and messages on Auroville over the years will show.
- Since 1968, Auroville has undeniably developed. Generations of Aurovilians have done outstanding work to secure the land, improve the environment, manage water resources, pioneer alternative energies, work with the villages — a development praised in India and beyond. Rigidly implementing the “crown” as currently proposed would, in effect, negate this very real progress, since it would involve razing buildings, destroying trees and passing over sensitive areas (i.e. groundwater recharge area) without considerate planning. It would not create a “smart city”, but a ravaged environment. And it is not keeping pace with today’s standard of urban planning.
- Between climate change, rising sea levels, heat waves, wildfires, massive floods, rising social disparity and instability, the world is beginning to realize that its cities are unsustainable. Forward-looking urban thinkers are now proposing new concepts of sustainable urbanism. Why should we in Auroville lag behind, instead of pioneering new ways towards urban sustainability?
- Moving towards a city will require fresh deep thought and not the blind application of an old plan. Several Aurovilians have already worked in this direction, trying to harmonize some of the initial ideas with present and future conditions; also non-Aurovilians such as Shri Balkrishna Doshi who has beautifully articulated the need for fluidity and adaptability. If such minds could come together with no dogmatic preconceptions, something new would certainly emerge.
- In the meantime, we firmly reject any group’s attempt to forcibly impose its own limited vision on the entire community. This violates the very spirit of Auroville and will only end up creating deep divisions.
- It is crucial that we find the way to work together and we commit to doing so, so that we can collectively build a city and a society worthy of the Auroville Charter.

This statement was signed by 450 residents of Auroville.

APPENDIX 2

Questions and concerns regarding Auroville Town Development Council around issues of framework, professionalism, values & ethics



“Auroville is an extraordinary experience, in the sense that the construction of Auroville is a unique attempt. The concept is very simple; it is a city built for 50,000 inhabitants... for people who are conscious that they can transcend their own limitations, and who are coming together for an experience comparable to that in a laboratory. It is a very special laboratory, because this city will be built to be at the service of Man. And I believe this approach is essential to understand how Auroville can grow, on what basis Auroville can be realised.

“Auroville should be at the service of those who will live there. That means that this city will not be constructed first and then occupied. But it will be the inhabitants who will define by a living experience the needs of the city. This approach is the opposite of that taken up to now by contemporary urban planners. Cities have been built and then people have been asked to inhabit them. Here the problem is reversed...”

[Roger Anger in an interview in 1973](#) (quoted in the Master Plan)

“When the model was made, the model was not really representing the kind of galaxy that I had seen in Roger's plan. And I think the first thing we should know is: are we really talking about a building? Or are we talking about celebration of life? That's what I think Mother was talking about. How do you charge the souls to manifest their subtle existence and the purpose of their existence? Do we talk about this at all? Or are we talking about ‘my kitchen is not working,’ or ‘the costs are like this,’ or ‘I have no road,’ or ‘I have no water supply’... **I think the issue is first, we should remove these words of architecture and building. We should talk about how do we celebrate life on this planet, and make a model.**”

- [Dr. B.V. Doshi in ‘Auroville City Conversations’](#)

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As a community of concerned citizens who are for the city, for the Crown Corridor, and for the development of Auroville following the Mother's Dream, which is what has drawn us here in the first place, we are committed to and asking for a fair, honest, transparent and truly participative process that celebrates and is built on Human Unity.

ATDC recently stated (N&N 03-04-21) that "The Mother has never said that there must be "unity" before the city can be built. She wanted the city to be built within a time-line." We do not see Human Unity as a point on Auroville's agenda that can be pursued by sitting together in a circle, after the city has been built. We believe that unity gets created in and through the process of harmonising seemingly opposing views and beliefs, when we choose to come together with our differences, learn to speak our truth with integrity, care and sensitivity, learn to listen deeply to other perspectives however different from ours, so that true consensus can be arrived at. Bypassing this step and pushing ahead with building while leaving a big part of the community feeling left out and disappointed would inevitably instil a disharmonious energy into the process and into the very bricks used for building the city, which will need far greater energy to later heal and transform. We resonate with the Mother's words, when she says "a clearly formulated thesis is set; against it is opposed the antithesis, formulated with the same precision. Then by careful reflection, the problem must be widened or transcended until a synthesis is found which unites the two contraries in a larger, higher and more comprehensive idea." We want to be part of a process which can help us widen and transcend the problem, so that everyone can arrive at a larger, higher and a more comprehensive idea!



After repeated attempts at engaging directly with those who hold ideas around hierarchy, authority, expertise, power, etc. that we do not resonate with, we are pained to see the manner in which tracts of land are being cleared in Auroville with a lack of community participation or consensus. In this situation of great urgency, we have felt compelled to compile a list of concerns and questions regarding the ATDC, around issues of framework, professionalism, values and ethics that we would like to bring to light. We are committed to whatever efforts may be needed to resolve these issues on the grounds of our shared aspiration and dedication to Auroville, Dream of the Divine.

APPENDIX 2

I - Questions of Legitimacy

1. Is the present ATDC legitimately constituted?
2. Is ATDC following its approved mandate?
3. Is private sponsorship of working groups from interested parties acceptable?

II - Concerns regarding Coherence, Integrity, Trust and Transparency

1. Attending a community meeting doesn't mean supporting a proposal
2. Clearing for a survey versus clearing the road
3. Planning the crown road by leapfrogging the community?
4. High-tension line: Shifting agreements and eroded trust
5. Beyond the Crown? ATDC's map with 100+ buildings marked in red...

III - Need for Objectivity, Inclusivity and Synthesis, Contributions waiting in the Drawers...

1. Why are significant professional studies and contributions from inside and outside Auroville ignored?
2. Conflating Galaxy Concept, Master Plan, Development Plan, and 'Mother's Dream'...

IV - Concerns regarding Competence, Foresight & Preparedness, Information Sharing, Institutional Memory

1. Yes to a pollution-free crown 'on which children can play safely' - now and not in an unknown future
2. Planning for water conservation, eco-disruptive conduct of people, waste management
3. Does an ambulance need a 6.7m wide road?
4. How much of Auroville's presently owned land need to be cleared for planned roads?
5. The need for institutional memory

V. Respecting basic human values and the ethics of Auroville

1. Diversity not division: The harmful effect of 'anti-city', 'anti-development' and 'anti-galaxy' labelling
2. ATDC's responsibility in discouraging extremism and vigilantism
3. The need for safe and constructive meetings, free of pressure tactics and traumatising language
4. Celebrations building community - the courage of inclusivity

All these concerns are detailed in the following pages.

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I - QUESTIONS OF LEGITIMACY

1. Is the present ATDC a legitimate working group?

The present ATDC members are once interim members who were made permanent by an Office Order (no. 491, dated 15th July 2021), which was in clear violation of the relevant Standing Order issued on 2019, as well as the RAD of 2017. This makes ATDC answerable to the community about its legitimacy.

2. Is ATDC following its legal mandate?

We have found the ATDC not following (hence violating) the RA mandate in the following instances:

1. ATDC has refused to follow an AVC appeal process, as noted in AVC meeting minutes. This is in contradiction to their 2007 mandate.
2. ATDC has not presented a DDP for community approval as is required by the RA mandate; they didn't do that for the Residential Zone development which they discussed with residents over there.
3. ATDC is not following their own established protocol put in place for evaluation, monitoring and implementation. For instance, before any action is taken on the ground, it has to be announced in N&N and a 2-week feedback process given. Trees have been cut in Centre Field and lands have been otherwise cleared without any such announcement or opportunity for feedback from the community.

3. Is private sponsorship of working groups from interested parties acceptable?

We have come to learn that a community member intensely engaged in town planning politics has been significantly sponsoring the ATDC. This wrong use of personal money and power is inadmissible, not only by the common standards of ethics for any governance, but all the more so in the city where 'money would no longer be the sovereign lord'.

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II - CONCERNS REGARDING COHERENCE, INTEGRITY, TRUST & TRANSPARENCY

1. Attending a community meeting doesn't mean supporting a proposal

When the Crown Walk was announced by the Secretary, about 380 people participated, drawn by their interest in understanding the proposed plan and/or by concern. This was later quoted by ATDC as *"having 380 people supporting us and the plan"*. This amounts to misusing interest and participation by implying presence as agreement.

2. Clearing for a survey versus clearing the road

The community, specifically the directly affected communities (Darkali, Center Field, Bliss, Youth Centre), was repeatedly promised that only minimal clearing of one-square-metre spots would be done for the purpose of the survey. Toby of ATDC said *"We just needed a point here and there to make places accessible for survey. But it was never said, not by us, that that had to be cleared. Most places were reachable, some places needed some bushes to be removed. But clearing 30 meters is really nonsense. I don't know how it slipped in there, by whom, but it happened. We saw it a bit too late. But when we saw it, we corrected it."* (Ref: Toby' sharing in GM 20-08-21)

In spite of repeated promises to only clear survey spots here and there, there has been an unabated cutting of shrubs and trees in the Centre Field, opposite Unity Pavilion, near Aurodam and in other places, clearing tracts of land as if preparing to lay a road. Despite stating that the survey is complete, some of these cleared areas haven't seen any surveyors come and carry out any work. Was the survey a pretext for clearing for the road?!



3. Planning the crown road by leapfrogging the community?

ATDC members have repeatedly stated: *"We don't yet have any plans. We will first complete the survey, then present the results to the community and the plans will be made in consultation"*. But clearing for a road is seen to be going on in full swing as though the plans have already been made.

How could the entire planning phase for the crown road have been accomplished within just a few days between completion of the survey and start of the physical work?

Why has the mandatory participatory planning with the community been omitted?

All the above make us wonder if the plans are really yet to be made, or if they are being withheld from the community, which directly contradicts ATDC's own declared intentions of partici-

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patory planning and collective decision-making, as listed in the poster below. It also goes against Auroville's fundamental values and principles of inclusivity and unity.



4. High-tension line: Shifting agreements and eroded trust

The community's trust in the ATDC has been severely affected by broken agreements and promises in dealing with the High-Tension Line and the clearing and planning of the Crown. Through the few months of engagement with Forest Group and Youth Centre around the issue of laying the HT line, there were repeated instances of assurances given but not honoured, proposals sought but ignored, and protocols and procedures bypassed. This has shaken the community's confidence in the ATDC's integrity and ability.

- In March 2020, ATDC asked for an EIA to justify any deviation for HT cable route towards GOI who gave funds. The Forest Group submitted the EIA in July 2020, but never heard back.
- On Nov 2, 2020 at the joint meeting at YC, there was consensus that the ATDC and Bliss stewards would look into the details of how to lay the HT cable along existing roads. A week later, [AVF sent a letter ordering the clearing of RoW of the future Crown and all Radials!](#) On Nov 17, [TDC replied with a letter, naming a few Aurovilians "opposing the work"](#)
- On Dec 1st, after the three interim members joined, ATDC emailed all the participants of the Nov 2nd joint meeting that they wanted to meet soon. However on Dec 17th, a work order was quietly issued (i.e. sent only to the WC) to lay the cable along RoW.
- After so many rounds of friendly conversations and promises made for collaboration, why would ATDC make a list of 'objecting Aurovilians' and supply it to the Foundation? This has deeply shaken the trust of the members of the community, in ATDC's integrity.

Relevant details are in the following 3 AuroNet articles:

<https://auroville.org.in/article/82384>

<https://auroville.org.in/article/82850>

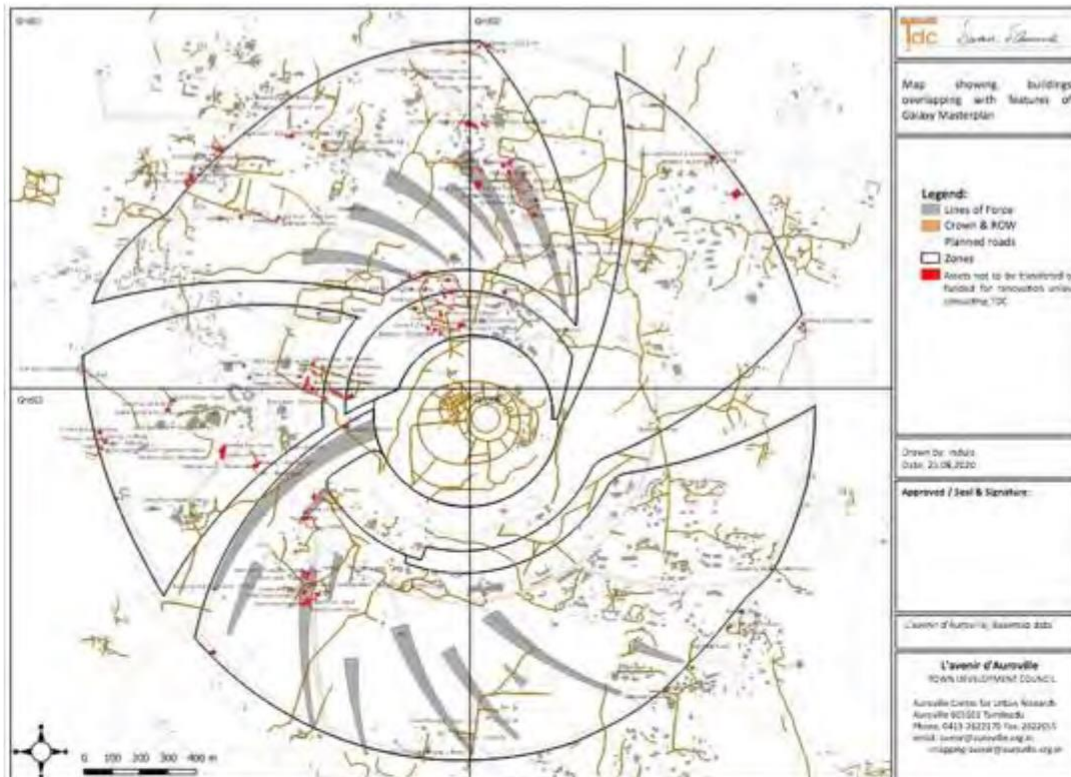
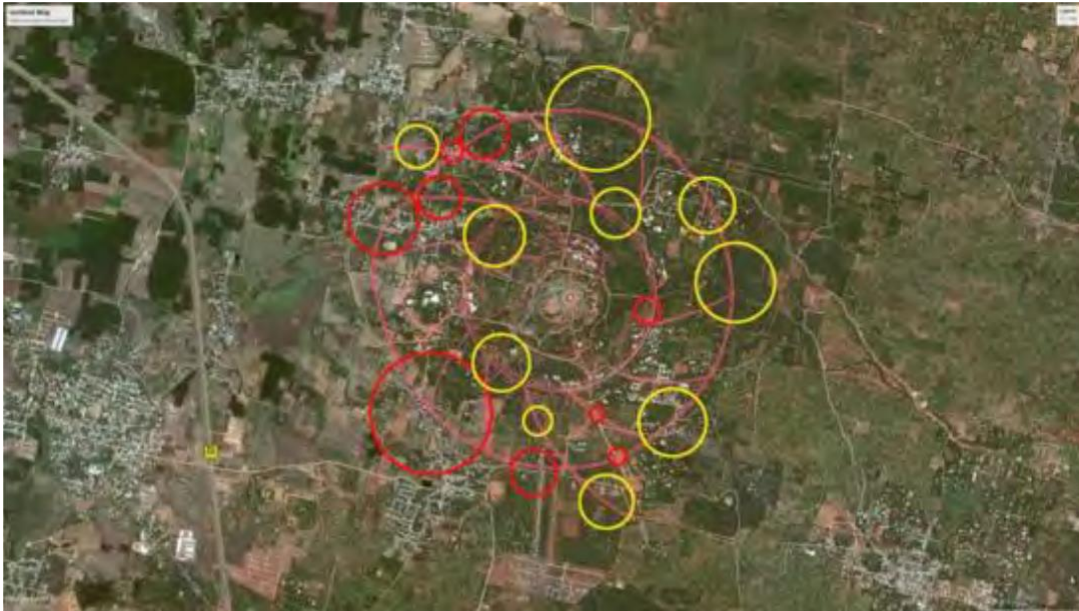
<https://auroville.org.in/article/83007>

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5. Beyond the Crown? ATDC's map with 100+ buildings marked in red...

While all attention is on the Crown, a map has been given by ATDC to Housing with 100+ Auroville buildings marked in red as being situated on the future radials, outer ring, or Lines of Force, and therefore no longer transferable without ATDC's explicit permission...

How is this possible without due consultation of the community, which was not even informed?!



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III - NEED FOR OBJECTIVITY, INCLUSIVITY AND SYNTHESIS. CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE DRAWERS...

1. Why are significant professional studies and contributions from inside and outside Auroville ignored?

Extensive professional studies and contributions, offered by experts from in and outside Auroville over many years, have been consistently side-lined instead of being given due consideration.

A survey is an informational basis, based on which four other surveys have to be done, without which urban planning cannot be undertaken. Urban planning is not about surveys and drawings. It is about political, social, economic and environmental issues.

When Dr. Doshi was advisor to TDC in 2011, four major studies were done addressing these four issues, each of which was done with a work order from TDC. Mr. Doshi with a group of Aurovilians spent months translating the Galaxy concept to meet the ground reality and prepared detailed reports and proposals. Among these, an important and relevant one for us is the [Auroville City Area - Land Suitability and Land Use Proposal](#) (April - May 2014)

Over the years, some architects and planners among the community have been given work orders by TDC to undertake studies. Numerous studies and workshops, such as those conducted by David N / the Dreamcatchers, the international team of town planners conducting the 2019 'January Sessions', the work on Crown Guidelines by Lata Iyer, etc. have been repeatedly ignored by the ATDC.

(See [Auroville Crown Way Study: Past, Present and Future: September 2021](#) for a comprehensive compilation of all these studies available for reading and viewing.)

Why aren't these studies being acknowledged, shared with the community and considered in the planning work today? We have come to believe that they have been side-lined because the outcome did not align with the singular idea of the perfect circle. Or is there another reason?



2. Conflating the Galaxy Concept, Master Plan, Development Plan, and 'Mother's Dream'...

The Mother's Dream was to have a city built for 50,000 people, divided into four zones (industrial, residential, cultural and international) interconnected in some way.

On the basis of this vision, a team of architects and town planners led by Roger Anger started to design the city in several stages, which finally took the shape of the Galaxy and was presented to the Mother. She accepted it as a plan that answered her parameters. This was how the Galaxy Concept was born.

How this Galaxy Concept would actually be designed and implemented on the ground, Mother had left to the architects and town planners. Even when she was guiding the work, she was

APPENDIX 2

always flexible to changing plans and aligning them with the ground reality. (Ref: [Aravinda's sharing in GM 20-08-21](#)) As Roger said in an interview *"the city is still to be invented, everything has still to be done through the daily experience and rhythm of the Aurovilians. Apart from these lines of force, everything is flexible, nothing is fixed."*

The Master Plan provides a policy framework which will serve as a guide in the preparation of five-year Development Plans and Annual Plans for implementation of the proposals.

We see all these terms being used interchangeably, causing a considerable amount of confusion.

Moreover the Galaxy Concept and the Master Plan are being narrowly interpreted following an exclusive line of thought, and imposed in the name of 'Mother's Dream' while conflating the above elements, without giving space to an open and rational discussion.

IV - CONCERNS REGARDING COMPETENCE, FORESIGHT & PREPAREDNESS, INFORMATION SHARING, INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY,

1. **Yes to a pollution-free crown 'on which children can play safely' - now and not in an unknown future**

Given its admitted failure in regulating traffic on the existing roads, and in absence of any communicated plans, the ATDC presently does not appear equipped to fulfil its vision of a community-friendly crown as promised and promoted. How does the ATDC propose moving towards this goal?

Even before we expand infrastructure, is it not important to demonstrate how...

... vehicular traffic on existing roads will be regulated, especially given that more and more residents and villagers around are beginning to own private cars?

... existing vehicles powered by fossil-fuels will be phased out so that only e-vehicles, cycles and pedestrians use the roads being proposed to be built?

The little mud path between New Creation and Sanjana has now become a busy road with trucks, buses and all kinds of traffic any time of the day or night, with several instances of serious lack of safety over the years. This is just one example. With so many such areas that are crying for immediate attention that are not being looked into, how do we trust any meaningful process for larger tracks of roads and infrastructure opening up?

2. **Planning for water conservation, eco-disruptive conduct of people, waste management**

The community has not seen any plans for these essential, non-negotiable elements of planning that need to be in place before starting any road.

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3. Does an ambulance need a 6.7m wide road?

In other words, what is the need for a 6.7m wide road for just cyclists, pedestrians, and emergency & service vehicles? Auroville's paved roads, including the crown road, are mostly between 4 and 5 metres wide!

How are these numbers arrived at?

And if the road itself is meant to be for cyclists and pedestrians as stated by the TDC in its GM on Friday 17th September, then why is there a separate area for pedestrians and cyclists?

4. How much of Auroville's presently-owned land would need to be cleared for planned roads?

The figures declared by the TDC for land needing to be cleared for the crown, ring and radials - i.e. 1.64% of Auroville's total land - are vastly understated. These numbers are based on 20 sq km as the area of the city (5 sq km) + the green belt (15 sq km) which includes the villages, poramboke lands, two large water bodies, and vast areas of land not owned or controlled by Auroville. If we subtract all these from the 20 sq km, we will be left with a much higher percentage!

5. The need for institutional memory

TDC seems to have a lack of institutional memory in multiple aspects of planning of the city, in spite of the same persons serving on the TDC over several mandates. Examples of this are numerous, as pointed out by ex-TDC members and community members who have worked with and for previous formations of L'Avenir. One striking example is the ['Outcome of TDC meeting with Aurodam and Centre Field residents and other concerned Aurovilians' from March 2013](#), which furnished understandings that seem to be largely ignored or forgotten as recent meetings are painfully re-inventing the wheel.

It would also be expected for a community aspiring towards effective participatory planning that the results of community-wide consultations would be shared back to the community; this seems to have been omitted in a number of instances. [Subhasini's consultative study completed in January 2021](#), as well as the last few months' initiatives at including the community in planning the crown are cases in point.

V - RESPECTING BASIC HUMAN VALUES AND THE ETHICS OF AUROVILLE

1. Diversity not division: The harmful effect of 'anti-city', 'anti-development' and 'anti-galaxy' labelling

Aurovilians (including some senior urban planners who have been involved in developing projects along the Crown against many odds) asking for a transparent, clear and inclusive process have been stigmatised and accused as being 'anti-city', 'anti-development' and 'anti-galaxy', thus fomenting a deep divide in the community and trivialising the real issues of town planning. This

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attitude must change most urgently, and the community members in apex groups, most of all in the ATDC, carry a very major responsibility to make this happen. And to what purpose did the TDC hand over to the Foundation a list of names of Aurovilians deemed to be opposed to the 'Master Plan' at the time of the HT line issue?

2. ATDC's responsibility in discouraging extremism and vigilantism

Why has the ATDC not taken a stand and discouraged provocative and abusive conduct by 'perfect-circle' activists, on multiple occasions, both on the ground (for instance during the 'Crown road walk and talk' of 31st July, when groups of 'volunteers' came to 'clear' the land subsequently, as well as online (on AuroNet etc)? While the line between condoning and supporting may be blurry, the ATDC has a share of responsibility in allowing rumours and labelling to fester in the community's tissue.

3. The need for safe and constructive meetings, free of pressure tactics and traumatising language

In short-notice meetings with residents directly affected by the plans, TDC has been seen to use and endorse psychological pressure tactics and offending language ('trespassers', 'encroachers'), in absence of the wider community that should have a presence in such negotiations.

Darkali is a forest sanctuary that has been lovingly and painstakingly nurtured over decades from a pebble desert into a forest park for the future city, through the work and fundraising efforts of its stewards. In their words: *"We were singled out with a few other Aurovilians and summoned, with a two-hour notice, by the Secretary to a meeting with the TDC and Working Committee and members of a group called the 'Universal Township Support Group' to be publicly insulted, verbally trashed, treated as trespassers and rogue elements during four hours. We were initially isolated and put under such pressure that made us feel obliged to cut our own trees to satisfy the extreme wish of urgency forced upon us by the TDC..."*

In a recent meeting with concerned stakeholders, the TDC mentioned that if Auroville doesn't make the road now the government will step in and do it. This statement was perceived as a veiled threat.

4. Celebrations building community - the courage of inclusivity

On the recent Ganesh Puja, an invitation to the 'community' to gather and ask for the manifestation of the City was addressed exclusively to those being in favour of the 'perfect circle'- one more instance of dividing the community. We believe that we - working groups, informal groups and individuals - can and must embrace a genuinely inclusive attitude if we are sincere in our aspiration to bridge the present gaps and build the Auroville to which Mother has called us.

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IMPORTANT RESOURCES FOR REFERENCE

[Charter of Auroville](#)

[History of Perspective Master Plan 2025](#)

[Report of the Study to identify Auroville's Development Priorities for 2021-2026 \(draft - 008\)](#)

(Directions for growth with development policies, planning and programs) A study undertaken by L'avenir d'Auroville (TDC) for the preparation of "Auroville Detailed Development Plan" with Suhasini Ayer as the consultant and coordinator

[Auroville - a way forward](#)

Collaborative sessions, January 2019

[Crown Ways](#)

David Nightingale's presentation of a people- and nature-friendly Crown Way

[Auroville Crown Way Study: Past, Present and Future: September 2021](#)

A comprehensive compilation by Prashant, Suhasini, Lata, Dharmesh, Tejaswini, Fabian & Team of all the studies carried out so far and meaningful ways forward.

[Report of a meeting between TDC and residents of Centre Field, Aurodam and other concerned Aurovilians held in March, 2013](#)

A report that demonstrates that the issues have remained largely the same over the last 8 years, which needs some serious introspection and investigation as a community!

A comprehensive compilation of studies done on [Mobility in Auroville](#)

Signed by 130 CONCERNED AUROVILIANS (Signatures received by 30.9.2021)

APPENDIX 3

DARKALI'S CROWN PROPOSAL

December 2021



APPENDIX 3

Development of the Crown in Darkali

The stewards of Darkali first started integrating a possible Crown through Darkali over 25 years ago when the then Auroville Development group showed where the alignment was projected. At that point the stewards did not further develop this area which was then predicted to be 5 meter wide, no trees were subsequently planted but it was protected and regeneration happened in that area.

It only became apparent in recent years that this alignment had changed, pulling the Crown into an area that had been actively managed not only in the sphere of tree planting but extensive soil and water conservation, this is directly adjacent to the old alignment.

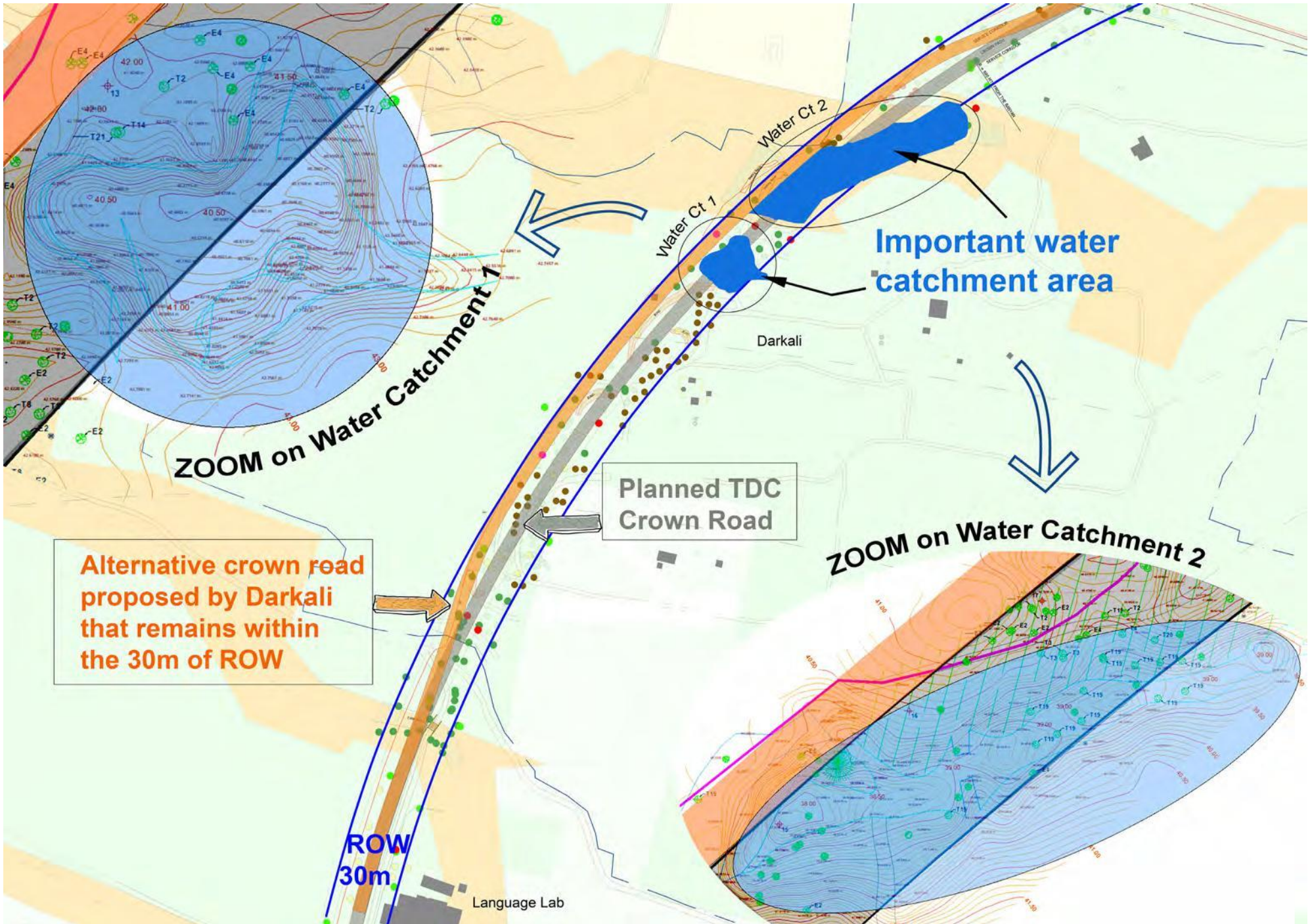
The recent events in chronological order: -

- 31/7/2021 – The Crown walk.
- 16/9/2021 – The latest survey map was presented to the Darkali stewards by ATDC members; Anbu, Toby and Debu.
- 23/9/2021 – A meeting held with Darkali stewards to see a way forward when many alternate proposals offered by the stewards were discussed with TDC members; Anbu, Toby, Saravanam, plus Gajendran.
- 7/10/2021 – The present alternate proposal by the Darkali Stewards was presented to TDC members; Anbu, Toby, Saravanam. They then walked on the land together to discuss and physically see the advantages of this route.
- 21/10/2021 – The Darkali stewards attended a meeting onsite at Darkali with the secretary Dr. Ravi and Srinivasamurthy from the Auroville Foundation and TDC members, Anbu and Toby. During this meeting it was stated that the alternate proposal offered by the Darkali stewards was not acceptable and that they would have to collaborate with the 16.7 meter clearing.

The main points of the proposed route put forward by the Darkali stewards: -

- The alignment falls within the 30 meter Crown parameters as per TDC survey.
- The route requires very little tree removal compared to a massive clearing of dense indigenous vegetation as well as substantial areas of large mature trees for the TDC route.
- The route does not impact the exhaustive rain water conservation work carried out in the area compared to the extensive damage caused by destroying two key water catchments if TDC proposal was followed.
- Most of the route has been carefully cleared.

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Water catchment 2 with the TDC road proposed over it



The two options



A stand of large trees to be cut within TDC's proposal

APPENDIX 3



Darkali's proposed alternative with TDC's route to the left



Water catchment 1 with the TDC road proposed over it (to the right)



Ficus bengalensis, large tree to be cut if following the TDC's proposal

APPENDIX 4

From: **Evolving Galaxy** <evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com>

Date: Sat, 23 Oct 2021, 11:40 am

Subject: Welcome & Note of Concern to the new Av Governing Board members

To: <govtam@nic.in>, <lg.pon@nic.in>, <nirima@gmail.com>, <aravindan.neelakandan@gmail.com>, <gghosal87@gmail.com>, <rssarraj@gmail.com>, <gbnandana1956@gmail.com>, <neetaprasad@pib.gov.in>, <neetaprasad@gmail.com>, <jsfa.edu@gov.in>

Cc: workingcom <workingcom@auroville.org.in>

Dear members of the Governing Board of Auroville,

We are delighted to know that a new Governing Board has been constituted. We warmly welcome you all and we hope that you will visit Auroville very soon.

During your visit you will sense that there is a new energy flowing here, especially since the arrival of the new Secretary, Dr Jayanti Ravi.

Discussions on a master plan for AV have resumed but unfortunately not progressed, in the absence of a real, meaningful dialogue.

Despite our best efforts to discuss views based on long experience on the ground and documented and professional studies, some people are attempting to enforce a five-decade-old plan upon the community, projecting it as “Mother’s plan” (while Mother never approved of any particular plan as final!) and disregarding Auroville’s lines of development in these five decades.

Auroville’s work in eco-restoration, alternative energies, water conservation, handicraft development, rural development etc., have been widely acknowledged, emulated, replicated in India and beyond, and this work would be seriously jeopardized were the five-decade-old plan enforced without considerable adaptations to today’s reality.

Two recent documents (one signed by 450 people, and another one signed by 120 + Aurovilians) have clearly explained why imposing a five-decade -old plan just like that would have grave implications for the future of Auroville. (Kindly see attached files.)

We invite you to call for and encourage a genuine dialogue so that Auroville's master plan can be finalized, taking into account all the recent work and recommendations by experts and respecting the achievements of Auroville in critical areas, especially land restoration, afforestation and water management.

We strongly believe that the final master plan should be subjected to a rigorous environmental audit: the world is now looking for a new paradigm of urbanism and Auroville must show the way, not “repeat the errors of the past”, as said by the Mother.

We are keen to meet you in person whenever you come, to present this perspective to you.

Thank you!

Warmly,

49 Concerned Aurovilians

PUDUCHERRY

Aurovilian gets award at U.N. climate conference



M. Dinesh Varma

PUDUCHERRY, NOVEMBER 11, 2021 22:35 IST
UPDATED: NOVEMBER 11, 2021 22:35 IST

SHARE ARTICLE

PRINT A | A | A



Suhasini Ayer received the 2020-21 Green Solutions Award at the COP26 UN Climate Conference.

Suhasini Ayer's Humanscapes Habitat project won her the honours

In a rare honour, Suhasini Ayer, architect from Auroville, was presented with the Green Solutions Award during the ongoing COP26 summit, the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, for the Humanscapes Habitat project of creating an affordable and sustainable housing hub in the universal township.

As an experimental project designed for approximately 500 inhabitants, the

Humanscapes project also seeks to serve as launchpad for research into creating future developments that can withstand the impacts of climate change.

The project got the award in the Sustainable Construction category at the climate summit. The Green Solutions Awards 2020-2021 is an international competition run by the Construction21 network, a collaborative and networking platform for stakeholders interested in sustainability, that spotlights exemplary solutions integrated into buildings, districts and infrastructures contributing to the fight against climate change. As many as 192 candidates participated in the contest at the global level.

Ms. Ayer, a graduate of 'Delhi School of Planning and Architecture' joined Auroville in 1985 and is a co-founder of the Auroville Centre for Scientific Research, an organisation dedicated to research and experimentation in the being sustainable also wants to address the issues of skill development and capacity building of construction labour, who are mostly distressed migrants in India, to improve their economic condition and reduce construction waste in the habitat sector to meet India's commitment to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The habitat project has integrated five goals as part of the sustainable human settlement mission that include designing a sustainable built environment with solar passive building design coupled with efficient functional space layout.

Our code of editorial values

Trending in Puducherry

Puducherry IndiGo may start operations from Puducherry

Puducherry COVID-19 | Puducherry lockdown extended with relaxations

Puducherry Associate professor from Pondicherry varsity honoured

Puducherry Puducherry reports 6 new cases of COVID-19, one death

Puducherry IndiGo interested to launch air services from Puducherry

Puducherry University saves ₹1 crore in energy bill

Puducherry Do's and Don'ts

Puducherry Lockdown in Puducherry extended till December 15

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Google+ Platform
Piano
Truste Consent

Puducherry government approaches SpiceJet to renew operations

"We have formally requested the operator to resume services from the airport at the earliest as several COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted," said Minister K. Lakshminarayanan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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Top Picks in The Hindu today

Explained | Questioning the impartiality of the

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Xenon
Google+ Platform
Piano
Truste Consent

APPENDIX 6

From: Sarada Natarajan <sarada.natarajan@gmail.com>

Date: Monday, 29 November 2021 at 6:19 AM

To: <govtam@nic.in>, <lg.pon@nic.in>, <nirima@gmail.com>, Aravindan Neelakandan <aravindan.neelakandan@gmail.com>, <gghosal87@gmail.com>, <rssaraju@gmail.com>, <gbnandana1956@gmail.com>, <neetaprasad@pib.gov.in>, <neetaprasad@gmail.com>, <jsfa.edu@gov.in>, <office@kaiciid.org>, <info@gpiw.org>, <yogabi@roottolight.com>, <vco@aurouniversity.edu.in>, <Dena.Merriam@finnpartners.co>, Michel Danino <micheldanino@iitgn.ac.in>, Michel Danino <micheldanino@gmail.com>, American Institute of Vedic Studies <vedicinstitute@gmail.com>, <shambhavi.yogini@gmail.com>

Cc: <contact@aurovillecanada.org>, <info@auroville.de>, <auroville-pamplona@auroville.es>, <itxaso.recondo@gmail.com>, <info@auroville.es>, <aurovilleinternationalfr@gmail.com>, <aurovillehungary@gmail.com>, <info@auroville.nu>, <sweden@auroville-international.org>, <info@aviuk.org>, <info@aviusa.org>, <aviny@aviusa.org>, <avi@auroville.org.in>, <escuchaintegral@gmail.com>, <anandi7@yahoo.com>, <janaviaus@auroville.org.in>, <AVI-WA@outlook.com>, <auroville.international.belgium@gmail.com>, <paulobpereira@uol.com.br>, <ateljevic.irena@gmail.com>, <maxbeck_100@hotmail.com>, <aviliaisongreece@gmail.com>, <haiti@auroville-international.org>, <sadhanaforest@gmail.com>, <ptlloyd65@gmail.com>, <juergenfaulstich@gmail.com>, <Yuval@auroville.org.in>, <israel@auroville-international.org>, <auroville.italia@gmail.com>, <avijapan@auroville.org.in>, <yes_nurlan@yahoo.com>, <kenya@auroville-international.org>, <kenya@sadhanaforest.org>, <Avikorea@auroville.org.in>, <kaziseibutis@gmail.com>, <sbenoit@pt.lu>, <info@transformarte.com>, <montenegro@auroville-international.org>, <Newkarma11@gmail.com>, <Lisa.c.joanes@gmail.com>, <avi_russia@mail.ru>, <kornienkoart@yandex.ru>, <jaredquek@gmail.com>, <auroville.southafrica@gmail.com>, <camille.egger@bluewin.ch>, <gunnuron@gmail.com>, <toshak2000@gmail.com>, <rafaelgsalguero@hotmail.com>, <info@auroville-international.org>

Subject: Fwd: Suggestion/concern regarding the development work in Auroville Foundation.

This is for your kind attention and action.

Regards

Sarada Natarajan, Ph.D.

Art Historian

----- Forwarded message -----

From: unesco.edu <unesco.edu@nic.in>

Date: Wed, Nov 24, 2021 at 9:54 AM

Subject: Suggestion/concern regarding the development work in Auroville Foundation.

To: Auroville Foundation <avfoundation@auroville.org.in>

Cc: <sarada.natarajan@gmail.com>, K. Sanjay Murthy <secy.dhe@nic.in>, secretaryavf <secretaryavf@auroville.org.in>, srinivasmurty <srinivasmurty@auroville.org.in>, Angshuman Basu <abasu-avfn.py@nic.in>, S K Samantaray <sk.samantaray@nic.in>, Saroj Kumar Choudhary <sarojchoudhary.edu@nic.in>, BINDU RAJAGOPALAN U D C, Dept. of Education <bindurajagopalan.edu@nic.in>

APPENDIX 6

Sir/Madam,

This is in reference to the concern expressed by Dr. Sarada Natarajan through her e-mail addressed to the Secretary (HE).

2. In this regard, Auroville Foundation may ensure that the development work in Auroville Foundation (AF) be done under the guidance of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to preserve the archaeological heritage in Auroville.

3. The above suggestion is for your information and necessary action.

With regards,

Section Officer (UU/IFC)
Department of Higher Education
Ministry of Education
Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi - 110001

From: "sarada natarajan" <sarada.natarajan@gmail.com>
To: "K. Sanjay Murthy" <secy.dhe@nic.in>
Cc: "RAJ BHAVAN, CHENNAI" <govtam@nic.in>, "Lt Governor of Puducherry" <lg.pon@nic.in>, nirima@gmail.com, "aravindan neelakandan" <aravindan.neelakandan@gmail.com>, gghosal87@gmail.com, rssaraju@gmail.com, gban dana1956@gmail.com, "Neeta Prasad" <neetaprasad@pib.gov.in>, neetaprasad@gmail.com, "Darshana Dabral" <jsfa.edu@gov.in>
Sent: Sunday, October 31, 2021 10:32:19 PM
Subject: Auroville Foundation and Archaeological Heritage of India

From

Dr Sarada Natarajan
307, Renaissance Woods I
Jarakabande Forest Road
Jalahalli West
Bengaluru 560 015

To

Mr. K Sanjay Murthy IAS
Department of Higher Education
127-C Wing, Shastri Bhavan
Dr. Rajendra Prasad Road
Rajpath Area,
Central Secretariat,
New Delhi 110001

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Dear Sir,

Kindly find attached the reply of a request that I sent to the Auroville Foundation regarding the possible destruction of archaeological heritage in the development proposed in their premises.

I request you to follow up this matter. According to their reply, it seems that they are pursuing the said development with no survey done and no information regarding archaeological excavations already carried out by their teams and advertised in their archaeological park.

I sent this RTI because it is the constitutional responsibility of every Indian citizen to protect our national archaeological heritage and consequently I am shocked by the uncaring attitude of the Auroville Foundation.

Please see these links to have information on the archeological work done in Auroville. [Archaeology in Auroville's International Zone - Auroville Wiki](#), <https://youtu.be/GaH5MtS6KSg> and [News & Notes 724:Auroville's Archaeology – An Overview and Future Prospects - Auroville Wiki](#)

I request you to kindly ensure that development work proceeds with due attention to our irreplaceable archaeological heritage **under the guidance of the ASI**.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sarada Natarajan
Art Historian
Bengaluru

APPENDIX 7

Letter from Youth Centre members to ATDC rejecting its work order which dishonoured earlier proposals

3rd December 2021

Dear ATDC,

We are appalled to say the least by this email. In our last meeting at SAIER (in the presence of some members from ATDC and the Forest Group), we left feeling very positive about the presented proposal.

The current ATDC, Resident Assembly approved or not, has at the very least, demonstrated its self-contradictory conduct, entirely lacking of honesty, integrity and transparency with the community. Despite its legality being currently disputed, in the spirit of collaboratively deciding the future of Auroville, we have repeatedly shown extensive flexibility, presence and willingness to cooperate. We've attempted to propose innovative solutions, aided by experts and elders from the community, which have largely received positive community feedback.

We then invite you to explain how this conversation got to the point of starting work next week. Such short notice on a clearly sensitive community issue allows us to only call this out for what it is — bullying.

We do not accept your order.

We reject the way you have been playing with the community in the name of the future of Auroville. We have not been shown a single proposal outlining an actual plan for the future of this space by you while we've proposed many. We believe you have been delaying and wasting our time and resources. We have also been promised but not yet allocated any resources to rebuild our Mainspace, Kitchen or Gameroom, all offer a living fact - that generations of Aurovilian youth have built the structures that stand before us.

Auroville's 'development' cannot come at the cost of the idea of Auroville itself. Auroville's youth today is willing and eager to continue Youth Centre's legacy of offering experiential learning through conscious development of green community spaces to our peers - the future of Auroville. We have the skills, the experience and the development plans closest to being Master Plan compliant and preserving the rich historical and ecological significance of the land in question. We will be sending a separate email with a budget and actual proposal for how we plan to use the space that we are happy to discuss further, separately.

In the meantime, since the Youth Centre is a community space and Auroville belongs to us all, we call upon our legal right to demand a way forward for the 'development of Auroville' that is RA approved. We are happy to accept any proposal the community collectively agrees upon, whatever it may be.

We also demand a stay on this order on the grounds of short notice, since we already have events planned for the next two months, starting with a workshop fair by Youth Link on 11 Dec and followed by the annual Christmas fair. We also do not currently have a venue with similar infrastructural capabilities to host our weekly pizza nights, a critical source of our income.

In service of the Dream,
Youth Centre

APPENDIX 8

51-crore special budget for infrastructure development: Statement by Funds & Assets Management Committee (FAMC)

02 Dec, 2021

Dear Community,

On November 30th, and through unofficial channels, the Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC) received the attached Rs. 51 crore special budget for infrastructure development. We are given to understand that this budget has been submitted to the Government of India and has not yet been sanctioned. This special budget is for the remaining months of the fiscal year 2021-2022 and if sanctioned, would need to be utilised in large part within a very small window (by 31 March 2022). This would mean that the projects included in the budget are envisaged to be completed in large part within that same timeframe.

The FAMC has many questions and concerns about this budget proposal and its related works, and we would like to inform the community that the FAMC has not been involved in any manner whatsoever in its creation, neither initiating, planning, approving or endorsing it. We understand that discussions on these projects and the special budget may have begun back in June or July of this year between the Auroville Foundation (Secretary), the Working Committee and the ATDC. The FAMC has never been invited to participate in these discussions nor have we ever been informed that discussions of this nature were even taking place.

We have also been given to understand that any allocation will not be channeled through the Unity Fund, but that instead for each beneficiary a separate bank account would be required, as per new guidelines issued by the Government of India.

Given the above, we assume that if the budget is sanctioned, FAMC will bear no role or responsibility in advancing the funds, nor in monitoring the proper utilisation of the funds nor the technical progress of the works, nor the administrative requirements of the Government of India. We assume these responsibilities will be borne by the Auroville Foundation and the ATDC alone.

We also take this opportunity to express our bewilderment that the Working Committee has not till date informed or consulted the Residents' Assembly or the FAMC on this matter. We notice a pattern of behavior here where important matters of this nature are not being shared with the residents and other stakeholders. We are also concerned that diversity of opinions and views and legitimate concerns of the residents and stakeholders (such as FAMC) are therefore not being in turn shared with the Secretary and Auroville Foundation office by the Working Committee.

We hope that the Working Committee will take this opportunity to sincerely reflect on its role within the assembly of residents and its accompanying responsibilities to the residents, which at a bare minimum should be timely communication and reporting of important developments (such as this one) to the residents and all stakeholders involved.

The members of FAMC

Attached files:

211112 ATDC infrastructure development budget FY 2021-22 FINAL.xlsx (16.47 KB)

APPENDIX 9

4-5 December 2021

Dear Dr. Jayanti Ravi,

Dear friends of the Auroville Working Committee,

It is with great dismay that we have learnt of the recent developments in Auroville and the major police operation which has led to several arrests among Auroville residents.

We are especially concerned that this event has taken place in the eve of Sri Aurobindo's Mahasamadhi and that it has happened at a place which has been created by and for the youth of Auroville. We see it as a devastating sign in the light of Auroville's efforts, which AVI is supporting by all means, to attract youth from all over the world, as also stipulated by the Governing Board in the minutes of its recent meeting.

We urge all those involved in these operations to restrain themselves and take all necessary measures to de-escalate the situation in a spirit of mutual understanding and collaboration. We are very concerned that an aggravation of this conflict would only create a further and deeper division in the Auroville community as well as inner wounds that might take quite some time to heal, thus hampering the ideal of human unity we are all striving for.

Respectfully yours,

The Board of Auroville International (AVI)

MENU



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TAMIL NADU

Villupuram MP urges TN CM to intervene and safeguard peace in Auroville



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

VILLUPURAM, DECEMBER 06, 2021 11:37 IST

UPDATED: DECEMBER 06, 2021 11:37 IST

SHARE ARTICLE

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Lok Sabha MP D. Ravikumar for Villupuram constituency | Photo Credit: SINGARAVELOU T

D. Ravikumar said that Auroville Foundation should not indulge in any unilateral move, and take decisions contrary to the views expressed by members of the Resident Assembly, to clear trees for a road-laying project

Villupuram Member of Parliament D. Ravikumar has urged the Tamil Nadu Government to immediately intervene and safeguard peace and tranquillity in Auroville in the district.

In a letter addressed to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, Mr. Ravikumar said that Auroville was conceived

as a universal township with people from different countries living and working together. Auroville's afforestation project has come to ensure the protection of the environment because of the large area of green cover it has brought up, particularly in Villupuram district, which has very low green cover in the State. However, developments over the last few days in the township are causing concern, he said.

Also Read: Aurovillians continue with protest against road laying, work halted

Mr. Ravikumar said that Auroville Foundation should not indulge in any unilateral move and take decisions contrary to the views expressed by members of the Resident Assembly to clear trees for the road-laying project. It is learnt that the secretary of the Auroville Foundation Jayanti S. Ravi had decided to go ahead with the project around the Matrimandir and the Union Government had also allocated funds for the same, he said.

APPENDIX 10

“Though the Resident Assembly has protested the move and suggested an alternative road for laying of the road, there has been no breakthrough in talks. In the meanwhile, on the directions from the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, trees were cleared in the township for laying the road. Members of the Youth Centre who protested the move were also assaulted and intimidated and threats were made to revoke their passports. This is highly unfortunate,” Mr. Ravikumar said.

Also Read: [Removal of trees to be seen in wider environmental context](#)

The MP claimed there have been allegations that Auroville was sought to be grabbed by those championing the cause of the RSS. The Governing Board of Auroville was recently constituted and Ms. Ravi who had previously served in Gujarat has been appointed as the Secretary while the Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi has been nominated as the Chairman. Though Auroville was located in Tamil Nadu, it does not have a single member from the State on its Board, he contended.

Aurovillians have complained that the Foundation members have been trying to bulldoze their way with the project bypassing the Auroville Act and the genuine concerns of the residents. Any such move would bring a bad name to the State government. The Chief Minister should immediately intervene and ensure peace in Auroville, he added.

THE HINDU

Our code of editorial values

Related Articles



Villupuram MP urges TN CM to intervene and safeguard peace in Auroville

This article is closed for comments.

Please [Email the Editor](#)

APPENDIX 11

Personal statement from a Working Committee member on the events at Youth Centre on 4th December

07 Dec 2021

I have been really distressed by the abrupt turn of events at the Youth Center on Saturday 4th, especially during the night. I witnessed a heavy display of police security in a large section of the city area, and I found that this manner to try to execute a project is totally unacceptable. This should not be a way to sort out our internal impasse.

I have been engaged in my work in Auroville for many years in the planning and development and I believe that the Crown is an important part of an innovative planning concept that still is not fully studied and understood. The Crown has been approved two times from the RA as a key element of the Galaxy and this should be considered by everybody. No individual or group alone has the right to consider themselves as representative of the community and we should be open if some sacrifice has to be made for the collective development.

I have been part of crown conversation for many years, and this has been the first time where I saw some opening to dialogue by the representatives of the Youth Center and some forest group members. This has given the hope that a long-standing controversy, lasting more than 20 years, when some of the present users of the YC were not yet born, could come to a constructive conclusion.

Unfortunately, a hastened and abrupt communication, followed by police intervention, has put this process in jeopardy and inflicted a deep wound in our atmosphere.

At the moment of writing, it seems that this episode will further deepen our divisions. With the optimism of the will, I still hope that we can find a way to de-escalate and take back the situation in our hands.

The Master Plan is a flexible tool that was envisaged as a participatory model as stated in its annexure 5. It cannot be enforced with an authoritative institutional approach; it is the common effort of all its citizens and each of them should be open to adjust his sectional and personal views in order to allow a larger collective manifestation.

We have been called here to make an experiment to build a new society that will manifest in a city with a special character, and we should make a leap forward in this direction. We should not allow the administrative rigidity that has been expressed on one side, nor the attachment to the status quo and the past or present reality which is often expressed in our community to prevent this. We need to make an effort to leap out of the present crisis. Only a growth in collective consciousness can help us in this direction and each one should do our best to build a different future for the project that we are called here to manifest not for ourselves, but for the future and the humanity as a whole.

S.M.

APPENDIX 12

Letter of Protest from an Aurovilian to Working Committee & ATDC

7 December 2021

Dear Members of the Working Committee and ATDC,

It is surreal and mind-boggling to think that the action by Police and JCBs in the dead of night on Saturday-Sunday at the Youth Centre, could have the active support of any Aurovilian, leave aside members of our 2 essential groups, the WC and the ATDC.

That these very groups are our interface with the Auroville Foundation and various other official Indian bodies makes the situation dire and utterly unacceptable.

No matter what be our individual differences in opinions on the galaxy plan or the crown road or any other matter — this is NO WAY to solve it. We are all aspirant Willing Servitors seeking that elusive Divine Consciousness to illuminate our hearts, minds and actions — not thieves to be rounded up and placed out of the way while what is perceived as 'Mother's Plan' is executed.

As members of these groups, normally chosen by the community, you represent Auroville as a whole, ALL of Auroville, not any particular section of it or any particular viewpoint (whether it is an official one or a personal one).

You urgently need to step up and fulfil your role as organizers bringing seemingly opposing views together to a higher, wider and deeper synthesis. Just as each of us Aurovilians needs to step up (or step inward) into something truer.

Can you do this?

A.T.

(Aurovilian)

APPENDIX 13

Letter of Protest from Auroville Outreach Media to Auroville Foundation on the gag order and the appointment of biased spokespersons

From: Auroville Outreachmedia <outreachmedia@auroville.org.in>
Date: Wednesday, 8 December 2021 at 11:30 PM
To: Auroville Foundation <avfoundation@auroville.org.in>
Cc: Working Committee <workingcom@auroville.org.in>, ATDC Auroville Town Development Council <avenir@auroville.org.in>, Auroville Council <avcouncil@auroville.org.in>, Secretary AV Foundation <secretaryavf@auroville.org.in>, Srinivasmurthy Palakodeti R <srinivasmurthy@auroville.org.in>, “Shri.R.N.Ravi” <govtam@nic.in>, “Dr.Tamilisai Soundarajan” <lg.pon@nic.in>, “Dr.Nirima Oza” <nirima@gmail.com>, Aravindan Neelakandan <aravindan.neelakandan@gmail.com>, “Prof. Goutam Ghosal” <gghosal87@gmail.com>, “Prof. R. S. Sarraju” <rssarraju@gmail.com>, “Prof. Nandana Gurappa Basappa” <gbnandana1956@gmail.com>, “Smt. Neeta Prasad” <neetaprasad@gmail.com>, “Smt. Darshana M Dabral” <jsfa.edu@gov.in>, “Ms.Dena Merriam” <dena.merriam@finnpartners.com>, “MS. Gabi Gillessen” <yogabi@roottolight.com>, “Mr. Hasmukh P. Rama” <hp@aurohotelscom>, Michel Danino <micheldanino@gmail.com>, American Institute of Vedic Studies <vedicinstitute@gmail.com>

Subject: Appointment of Spokespersons – Auroville Outreach Media response

Dear Mr Srinivasmurthy,
(cc. WC, AC, FAMC, GB, IAC, ATDC)

It is with great dismay that I have received your statement requesting Auroville Outreach Media to “refrain on issuing any statements until further notice”, and that the Auroville Foundation “has decided to appoint” its own “Official Spokespersons”. It is particularly disappointing for me, considering the respectful and honest professional relationship that we have enjoyed since we began working together in 2005.

Outreach Media is an Auroville service in existence since 1996 and was recognised as an official working group in Auroville by the Governing Board in 2008. It is a service for the residents of Auroville.

We have always enjoyed a positive relationship with the Auroville Foundation, which entrusted us to manage Auroville’s external media matters till date. Following Dr Karan Singh’s suggestion made more than a decade ago, we worked closely with the Foundation to establish a permission process for filmmakers visiting Auroville that valued the interests of Auroville and the journalists. Moreover, former Secretary of Auroville foundation Sri Mohan Verghese Chunkath congratulated our hard work in organising outstanding media coverage of Hon’ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Auroville visit in 2018. In all these activities, the Foundation appreciated that we represent the voice of the community.

During the two decades of Outreach Media’s existence, we have patiently built up trust and mutual respect with local press, and assisted many national and international TV journalists to report on the many achievements of Auroville. We have also comprehensively documented the

APPENDIX 13

rich and varied life of the Auroville experiment, and made this content available to the community and the world.

Outreach Media's facilitation of all of the community's media matters over the years has enhanced Auroville's credibility through our commitment to freedom of speech and transparency. We manage a delicate balance between facilitating journalist's needs, upholding freedom of speech, and nurturing Auroville's interests in the hope of cultivating positive media coverage. Our approach aligns with the community's wider commitment to transparency (eg. making internal resources, such as News and Notes, budgets etc., available in the public domain).

I will, for the time being, respect your request to "refrain on issuing any statements until further notice" even though this does not align with Outreach Media's and the community's commitment to freedom of speech and transparency. However, I cannot take any responsibility for any media-related activities that might take place, given that nearly every citizen and journalist has access to social media in this digital age, and can create whatever content they want.

Yours sincerely,

F.M.

Auroville Outreach Media

Archives Building, Administrative Area

Auroville 605101, T. N., India

Fax: (+91) 413 2622 055

Cell: (+91) 9751655176 / 9443602194

Web: <http://www.outreachmedia.auroville.org>

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/auroville.outreachmedia>

APPENDIX 14

Representation from Seven Aurovilians to pause Crown Development

8 December 2021

To:
Secretary of the Auroville Foundation

From:
[Names of seven Aurovilians]

Subject: Representation Letter - Pause Crown Development

Dear Secretary of the Auroville Foundation,

This is to inform you that 476 Residents have moved the Residents Assembly Service (RAS) on 6th Dec 2021 to halt development on the crown until further notice from the Residents Assembly.

This process of decision making, as you might be aware of, takes a minimum of 30 days to conclude.

Considering the process has begun, we hereby request the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation to await the decision of the Residents Assembly (RAD) before continuing any further development on the crown. The announcement of the RAS has been attached below.

We draw your attention to Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (Perspective 2025) which makes a reference to the Detailed Development Plans (DDPs) which are to be prepared every five years, and the annual implementation plans. We request that the DDPs are finalised before commencing / continuing any development activities in Auroville.

Auroville has waited decades to manifest the crown. We can wait a few more weeks.

Sincerely
[Names of seven Aurovilians]

Representation Letter copied to:

1. Members of the Governing Board of Auroville
2. Members of the Auroville International Advisory Council
3. Working Committee of the Residents Assembly
4. Residents Assembly Service

CC for reference:

Auroville Town Development Council/L'avenir d'Auroville (ATDC)

APPENDIX 15

Statement by former Auroville International Advisory Council members to the
Chairman, Governing Board
9 December 2021

Dear Shri R. N. Ravi,

Having served on the International Advisory Council of Auroville for a number of years, many of us have a deep admiration for Auroville and its accomplishments and have made lasting friendships with many Aurovilians.

Recent alarming reports from trustworthy sources of conflict, intimidation and a police presence are not in the spirit of Auroville's ideals which we were invited to promote and protect. These incidents have already been reported in local and national media and international social networking platforms.

We are aware of the difficulty of your task and hope that in this auspicious year of Sri Aurobindo's sesquicentennial when the world's eyes will be turned towards his legacy that harmony prevails above all else.

Most sincerely,

Mark Tully, Vishakha Desai, Shaunaka Rishi Das,
Kabir Shaikh, Julian Lines, Doudou Diene, Marc Luyckx Ghisi

APPENDIX 16

An Aurovilian's Personal Statement of Experience at Youth Centre

9 December 2021

Dear Srimoyi, Anu, Dr Jayanti Ravi,

I write to you three specifically to share my experience of this morning and ask you to stop this action and the method you are applying to build the city of Auroville.

I have no interest in shape of road, that will get built in Auroville, and understand that trees can be grown, and buildings can be built by human endeavour.

Today I climbed on top of the JCB which was working at the YC [Youth Centre] and asked the driver to stop the machine. The driver was scared, he would have stopped. But 20 goondas surrounding the JCB, lifted me off and carried me away. Of course, in the process I got hurt physically, but that is not the point.

Human Unity will not be built by bringing police or goondas from villages. Neither will the city be built by this way. You all know that but at this moment are blinded by the narrative of perfect circle and sacred geometry.

Human Unity will be built by touching hearts, talking and solving and not being stuck in our positions. Bringing police and use of physical force are the means used for centuries by anyone in power. There is nothing NEW in that, it is the EASY way.

Resolving by negotiating and shifting and bringing down your egoic positions is the MORE difficult task, and that will build our unity. NOT the method being used now.

As you have taken a position of leadership then please show a new way, a way in the Spirit of Auroville.

I object to the tactics of manipulation, subterfuge, divide and conquer, and obstinacy to the extent of using strong arm tactics.

If you follow the old-world mentality brought in by the men in your group you will weaken the very Spirit of Auroville.

The very thing you want to protect is getting hurt by divisive actions.

Truly
D.K.

APPENDIX 17

Item No.01:

BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
SOUTHERN ZONE, CHENNAI

Original Application No.239 of 2021 (SZ)

(Through Video Conference)

IN THE MATTER OF

Navroz Kersasp Mody

...Applicant(s)

Versus

The Auroville Foundation and Ors.

...Respondent(s)

Date of hearing: 10.12.2021.

CORAM:

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE K. RAMAKRISHNAN, JUDICIAL MEMBER

HON'BLE DR. SATYAGOPAL KORLAPATI, EXPERT MEMBER

For Applicant(s): Mr. A Yogeshwaran

For Respondent(s): Dr. D. Shanmuganathan for State of Tamil Nadu

ORDER

1. The grievance in this application is that the 1st respondent- Auroville Foundation is engaged in cutting large scale trees from Auroville Forest area which has its own biological diversity and eco-sensitiveness.
2. It is stated that Auroville Foundation was established in the year 1968 as an autonomous body and they visualised a project for development of their area. They are developing a township on the basis of a master plan prepared by them not approved by any authority. Earlier they have done some construction work alone but now in the guise of expending the project by providing a ring road by name 'Crown Road' they have now proposed to cut large number of trees from the area which will come under the definition of 'Deemed Forest' as envisaged by the Hon'ble Apex Court in Godavaraman Case. If this is allowed to be cut

APPENDIX 17

without obtaining necessary planning and permission, then it will have great impact on the environment.

3. Learned Counsel appearing for the applicant had relied on certain newspaper reports to convince regarding the location of area with large number of trees and the manner in which cutting are done by using heavy machineries. Though, certain objections were raised before the authorities, no action was being taken by the authorities which prompted the applicant to file this application, claiming to be environmental activist to protect the Auroville Forest area against destruction, seeking following reliefs:

- a. Direct the 1st respondent to prepare a Detailed Development Plan including a mobility plan which is based on and respects the present day ground realities, to be approved as mandated in the Master Plan and implement projects based on such plan after necessary impact assessments and feasibility studies in an environmentally sustainable manner.
- b. Direct the respondents to pay costs to the applicant.
- c. Issue such other orders as it deems fit in the interest of the case and render justice.

4. Learned Counsel appearing for the State of Tamil Nadu submitted that Tamil Nadu Government has no interest in this matter. Though part of the area is falling within Tamil Nadu but the area where activities are going on is exclusively in the possession of the 1st respondent- Auroville Foundation and high dignitaries are at the helm of affairs of the administration of the Foundation.

5. On going through the allegations made in the application, we are satisfied that there arises a substantial question of environment as to whether any permission is required under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 for cutting trees from an area which can be treated as a 'Deemed Forest' under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. So, the matter is admitted.

6. Issue notice to the respondents by e-mail and also by speed post today itself and produce proof of service of notice. Dr. D. Shanmuganathan took notice for the 3rd respondent on whom copy of the application has also been served.

APPENDIX 17

However, Learned Counsel for the applicant is also directed to serve the copy of the application to the Department of Environment, State of Tamil Nadu as well for their information and instruct the Counsel regarding their stand in the matter.

7. Learned Counsel for the applicant is also directed to produce necessary requisite with the postal stamp and postal cover so as to enable this Tribunal to send notice by speed post today itself so as to ensure service on the respondents and proceed against them, if they did not appear in their absence in accordance with law.
8. Considering the urgency of the matter, we feel that ex-parte interim order will have to be passed, as if no interim order is passed then it is likely to cause greater damage to the environment. Even under Order 39 Rule 1 read with Section 19 (4) of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, if Court is satisfied that there arises an extraordinary circumstance which requires the Tribunal to exercise the discretion of issuing an interim order without hearing the other side, then Court can issue such order in order to protect and preserve the property which is said to be under danger.
9. So under such circumstances, we feel that the status-quo order can be passed directing the 1st respondent- Auroville Foundation not to fell any further trees till 17.12.2021 as no much damage will be caused to the other side if it is stopped for a short while in the interest of protecting environment.
10. 1st respondent- Auroville Foundation is directed to file their response or objection to the allegations made in the application on the next hearing date so that the question as to whether interim order will have to be continue or not can be considered on that date.
11. Registry is directed to communicate this order to the respondents by e-mail today itself so as to enable them to comply with the direction.

APPENDIX 17

12. For appearance of parties, filing independent response and hearing on question of continuing of interim order, post on 17.12.2021.

.....J.M.
(Justice K. Ramakrishnan)

.....E.M.
(Dr. Satyagopal Korlapati)

O.A. No. 239/2021(SZ)
10th December, 2021. (AM)



Auroville violence: Seeking your intervention

Nityanand Jayaraman <nityjayaraman@gmail.com>

10 December 2021 at 15:12

Reply-To: nity682@gmail.com

To: Chief minister of Tamilnadu <cmcell@tn.gov.in>, cmsec@tn.gov.in

Cc: cs@tn.gov.in, dgp@tn.gov.in, Devasahayam <deva1940@gmail.com>, TM Krishna

<tm.krishna@gmail.com>, Sudha Ramalingam <sudharamalingam1@gmail.com>, perumal murugan

<murugutcd@gmail.com>, Hariparathamam <hariparathamam@gmail.com>, V geetha

<geethv@gmail.com>, Henri Tiphagne <henri@pwtm.org>, "Sundarrajan G [Hard n Soft Technologies Pvt.

Ltd.]" <sundar@hnsonline.com>, Vasanthi Devi <vasanthideviv@gmail.com>

Kindly see updated letter below with two additional signatories

To: The Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu
Secretariat, Chennai 600009 (Via email)

Cc: Thiru Dr. Irai Anbu, IAS
Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu
(Via email)

Cc: Director General of Police
Government of Tamil Nadu. (Via email)

10 December, 2021

Respected Sir:

The Auroville International Township was set up as an incubation space for a society that prioritises peace, harmony, human creativity and the principles of freedom and democracy. It should be a matter of pride for Tamil Nadu that such a unique international township with residents from various countries living as one with local people has flourished on our soil. Aurovilleans have contributed to our land and culture with the work they have done in terms of re-vegetating and protecting the soil, their work on innovative small- and medium-scale artisanal industries and by promoting viable methods for organic farming and renewable energy.

We are deeply disturbed at the attempt by the Union government, acting through Tmt Jayanti Ravi, IAS, Secretary, Auroville Foundation, to take control of Auroville. We refer to the incidents over the last week where force has been used to demolish a youth centre, and mow down trees to construct a road. Since the middle of last week, the police has withdrawn. But now, the work is being carried out with hired strongmen who have been videographed roughing up women and youth standing in the way of the JCBs.

The details of the road and the masterplan that contains it are not important. Neither is the justification given by its proponents that the road project is in line with the Mother's wishes.

APPENDIX 18

What is important is that led by Tmt. Ravi, the Auroville Foundation's actions have polarised a community that has for decades worked by engaging creatively with conflict in order to live true to the principles of non-violence, democracy and freedom that ran through all of Mother's teachings. Nothing could be more ridiculous and sinister than to reduce the Mother's words to the construction of a road and destruction of a youth centre and trees. We see a pattern in the methods of the Union government in the manner it is drumming up xenophobic hysteria, and attempting to divide and rule in order to pursue its agenda. This does not bode well for Tamil Nadu that has so far managed to keep the agenda of hate and communal politics at bay. Also disturbing are reports that the works in Auroville are the first milestones in a project for commercialising spirituality as part of Swadesh Darshan's Spiritual Tourism Circuit.

We are gravely concerned with the prognosis of the goings on in Auroville for the following reasons:

- a) The Auroville Foundation which controls 2500 acres of land in Tamil Nadu has not one representative of the state or local government, or even the local elected representative.
- b) The Foundation's governing council is filled with hand-picked members belonging with right-wing Hindutva leanings.
- c) No place is an island, and Auroville certainly isn't considering how it is not a contiguous piece of land but bits and pieces that are part of other Tamil Nadu villages. The masterplan of Auroville has to be in line with the overall development plans for the region and state, and cannot be seen in isolation. Its plan has to be located within the state's infrastructural vision, the aspirations of the villages that it is set amidst and the cultural ethos of Tamil Nadu.

The open threats, caught on video camera, issued by Tamil Nadu police to deport the very residents that make this township international are deplorable and not in keeping with a tradition that declared 2000 years ago that: யாதும் ஊரே யாவரும் கேளிர் (All places are one; all people are our kin).

We urge you to take note of the ongoing developments in Auroville seriously, and intervene with the Union government to ensure that decisions about Auroville are taken in consultation with the residents of Auroville and with the state government.

Sincerely,

Vasanthi Devi, former Chairperson, State Commission for Women, Tamil Nadu
Justice (Retd) D. Hariparanthaman, Madras High Court, Chennai
M.G. Devasahayam, I.A.S (Retd), Nagercoil
V. Geetha, Writer, Scholar, Chennai
Henri Tiphagne, People's Watch-Tamil Nadu
T.M. Krishna, Musician/Activist, Chennai
G. Sundarrajan, environmentalist, Chennai
Perumalmurugan, Writer, Namakkal
Sudha Ramalingam, Advocate, Chennai
K. Subramanian, former Secretary to Govt of India
Tara Murali, Architect, Chennai
Nityanand Jayaraman, Writer/social activist, Chennai

On Fri, 10 Dec 2021 at 14:59, Nityanand Jayaraman <nityjayaraman@gmail.com> wrote:

To: The Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu
Secretariat, Chennai 600009 (Via email)

Cc: Thiru Dr. Irai Anbu, IAS
Chief Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu
(Via email)

APPENDIX 19

Personal Statement from a member of the Working Committee

10 December 2021

Auroville, 28th February 1968, The Mother (Mirra Alfasa) called youth from all countries of the World and States of India with a handful of soil to kindle a new vision, with a spirit of freedom to choose a new way of life, 'a Youth that never ages'.

Days and nights from 4th December 2021 to 9th December 2021 have been intense with a severe attack by the forces which are against the new spirit of Auroville, using unlikely mediums as channels, unleashing dominance doing a vulgar dance wearing black robe of unconscious physical violence, all in name of the Divine. A trick which has been successfully practiced over millennia to suppress new light of free spirit in our human journey.

Beginning on morning of 4th December 2021, with an unsuccessful move of demolition by sending a JCB which then moved to 1 am on 5th December, day of Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo, with siege of 200 policemen arresting youth and thrashing women, leading to a final destructive move on Mahasamadhi day of Sri Aurobindo, a merciless destruction using brutal force of strong men shamefully hired to harass, aggress along with manhandling women on way to destroy the Youth Centre. The soil of hope and youth with which Auroville was born was trampled to dust.

On the way of this destructive drive was opening of a 16 m clearing of Bliss Forest to make way for a Crown Road, involving merciless crushing of trees tended like children over years.

All this has shaken me to the core and everyone around me in Auroville and in larger family in India and worldwide. Utter distraught, utter dismay, disheartened sadness or any other word are hard to express my feelings. Trampling of the Youth under the tyres of a JCB is like running chainsaws on our future.

Auroville town plan design is a unique and beautiful form of a galaxy, a mandala releasing energy of a future humanity, a cradle of a new man. In the galaxy plan is a 75 m crown which is a circular backbone connecting different zones of the circular town plan. Over past months intense discussions have happened on how to manifest the Crown. Auroville has its diversity and has multiplicity of views which need to be harmonized to come to an acceptable solution. The synthesis was near when a group of people with green fingers proposed a meandering road around the trees instead of following a perfect rigid circular road as planned in a master plan in 1999, very much a possibility with a 75 m wide space in circle of the Crown. However, the Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC) remained rigid and insisted on a perfect circularity of the road which needs destruction of few buildings and many old trees. Instead of choosing to sit and discuss the matter within the community forums of the Resident Assembly, ATDC choose to approach Office of the Secretary of Auroville Foundation to deliver a fixed rigid circle.

In any collaborative engagement openness, flexibility, suppleness and ingenuity is needed to arrive at an acceptable solution. This process needs to be given time and space instead of stiff targets of hours and days to achieve implementation. In a place like Auroville, which works like a giant family, one cannot build with corporate or governmental style systems. A circular

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participatory process is needed which is supple, organic, natural, experimental and evolves with time and grows.

Insensitivity and rigidity of the authorities resulted in an impasse which has now grown like a monster of horrendous proportions. Heated discussions gave way to brute state might leading to intimidation and strong-arm tactics. Are next steps going towards more violence, arrests, visa cancellations or deportations, which bring weight of a very heavy karma? I hope not. I pray for a peaceful path towards collaboration which opens up space for harmony to descend.

Many well-wishers and friends are worried about my wellbeing or being exposed to unforeseen risks on the way. I would like to thank all the protection, love and support I am getting from my worldwide family of elders, brothers, sisters, friends, mentors, mentees in an overwhelming generosity. My answer to everyone is to keep praying for peace, harmony and protection.

Salute to the spirit of Youth of Auroville, who have made destruction into an event of celebration, by coming together to rebuild the Youth Centre. You are my heroes.

I urge everyone to pause to retreat and reflect for working towards a harmonious solution. We will come out stronger and be closely together.

Love,

H.L.

Member, Working Committee of the Resident Assembly

APPENDIX 20

To: Respected Members of the Governing Board

11 December 2021

Like so many friends and well-wishers of Auroville, we have been pained by the polarization that has come into the Auroville Community, and it is imperative that we as a Council stay above such divisions. We understand the anger over the use of the police, and we understand the frustration of those who want to see the agreed upon development plan move forward. For sure, there have been missteps on all sides, but we are advising everyone not to linger in the anger and blame, but to work individually to calm emotions, step down and invoke the Mother. By allowing the vilification of the “other” we are working against the Mother’s ideal of human unity. This will not lead to a good result. To help with a cooling off period and to begin rebuilding trust, we would like to offer, in a spirit of goodwill for all, the following recommendations for everyone’s consideration, and assure you of our readiness to help in any way we can:

1. Let all sides *refrain from bringing in external agencies* to resolve Auroville’s internal issues, because it is not only an admission of failure, which will leave deep scars that will divide the community for a long time to come; it will also vitiate the atmosphere that might otherwise still bring about an internal resolution of issues.
2. In particular, to resolve disagreements among Aurovilians, we advise *not to have recourse to call agencies of the state such as police or courts or to seek warrants*, since that is explicitly against Mother’s will expressed on several occasions — “No army, no police” in particular.
3. We call on all to remember that in Mother’s own saying, *the manner in which Auroville is built is as important*, possibly more, than the outcome: “It’s not when Auroville has been completed: it’s the nations’ collaboration in creating something [that matters] – but creating something founded on the Truth instead of a rivalry in Falsehood’s creation. [What matters] is not when Auroville is ready – when Auroville is ready, it will be one city among all other cities and it’s only its own capacity of truth that will have power, but that ... remains to be seen.” (21 September 1966) Therefore it is incumbent on all of us to help towards this “foundation on the Truth” and trust right now, not in a distant future.
4. We call for an actual *practice of inclusiveness*: differing views and perspectives are unavoidable, yet Auroville’s challenge is to bring them together and find ways to harmonize them. In particular: (1) Many experts in Auroville have done outstanding work in many fields; this expertise and experience must be fully utilized in the planning of a city; (2) A first step could be to identify common ground, such as any area of the development of the future city that stake-holders and experts will all agree on, and focus on that initially, rather than on contending issues; (3) Given recent developments, and Auroville’s outstanding work in eco-restoration for decades, which has earned it worldwide respect, a thorough environmental audit, by respected and independent experts, of current and future plans seems an urgent necessity.

Members of the International Advisory Council

Gabi Gillessen, Michel Danino, Hashmukh P. Rama, David Frawley, Dena Merriam

APPENDIX 21

Statement by G.B. on sustainable integrated water resources management 12 December 2021

To Whom It May Concern

I would like to give my input in regard to the present, aggressive fast track development in Auroville from the background of my professional expertise in the domain of sustainable integrated water resources management. It is based on my experience, the observation of the ground, as well as scientific and practical knowledge of the area. This statement is deliberately based on logic and reason while I cannot escape that our present situation is impacted with emotions and badly hurt feelings, to which I do not wish to add.

Feel free to circulate this input.

Abstract

The actual planning and recent development of Auroville is based on decisions and actions done without prior consultation of residents and without detailed planning, by initiating enforced development that shall lead to multiple roads, fast track development and related major increase of population. It is to be expected that this way of proceeding with the development will result in serious damage for the coherency of Auroville and for the practical life of the villages located in the direct vicinity of the planned urban area, the green belt and farther villages. This includes 6 local villages with related populations and activities.

Main findings

The development, as pushed forward today, would offer a bypass from the NH 26 to the ECR, thus building up the traffic tremendously as well as invite uncontrolled business development with all related and well-known nuisances.

While a mobility study was conducted years ago, it is not considered in today's move and there is no alternative study available today. Missing is also a usable overall topographic survey: The one conducted in 2002, or so, being unusable for various reasons and the ongoing one is incomplete today, with large segments of the city area and the quasi totality of the greenbelt still remaining to be done.

To my knowledge, the following preliminary but absolute necessary work has not been conducted:

- Soil tests for any road and structural developments have not been conducted.
- Studies of elevation variations have not been conducted. The variation of the elevation on ground is significant and has seemingly never been taken into consideration. If ground elevation would have been studied it would have indicated that the "perfect geometry" of circular roads in Auroville is simply a mind projection coming from a 2 D perspective: Seen from bird eye's view, a circular road may look "perfectly round" while ground reality will

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show a different reality - a misleading understanding based on 2 D versus 3 D, or plan versus spatial perception...

- Detailed assessments have not been done for natural features like slope, canyons, drains, swales, ponds, recharge areas, estuaries and the large field of vegetation, trees and wildlife sanctuary. Their documentation and communication need then to be made available.
- Possibility of studies on alternative ways to address integration of infrastructure, eventually less invasive and less predominant in the urban context, is put aside.
- From the early stage of conception of the Galaxy and the Master Plan, the Green Belt and the City Area together formed the physical reality of Auroville. The Green Belt was an integrated part of Auroville. Following the present approach, the Green Belt with its activities and villages included, is entirely cut from the city area by a large road and related transit traffic. Detailed social and environmental assessments about the integration and interrelationship between the two core areas of Auroville and about how they are nurturing each other in their activities have not been conducted.

As Auroville is meant to be a place of never ending education one wonders why lessons are not learned:

Unending floods in Mumbai, Bangalore or Chennai this year are showcasing the impact of either wrong or insufficient planning of urban development. Also Auroville has not been spared from floods this year for the same reason. It is not understandable why these very critical points of studies of Auroville's existing or planned reality can be ignored.

Any urban development of Auroville will naturally have an immediate and long-standing impact not only on Auroville but also on the adjacent villages. This impact can be reduced by proper urban planning. The following impact scenarios need detailed attention:

- Risk of immediate increased flood within the city area and in 3 of the adjacent villages (Edayanchavadi, Kottakarai, Allankupam) as one could witness now happening in the Residential Zone. This year's flooding happened for similar reasons of unconsidered environmental concern in planning and development - with related erosion, eventual damages of lands and properties.
- As per layout of the roads (Crown, Outer Ring road and radials) Auroville loses precious ground water recharge areas, while Auroville and its surrounding already suffers from massive over-extraction, fast decline, pollution and sea water intrusion.
- Dissemination of pathogens through flooded septic facilities as seen in December in Prarthna.
- Social impact: If Auroville continues to develop in these lines of unconsidered planning, effects and damages within and without cannot be prevented:
 - Serious damage to the fragile relationship with villagers, local administration and stakeholders.
 - Serious harm to the social fabric of Auroville with its 50+ nationality, its trust and faith in Auroville values.

Conclusive thoughts and legal aspects

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Auroville made tremendous efforts to regenerate the environment in the area, a well-acclaimed effort, and to protect the local natural and human resources from further degradation and decline, finally promoting such recognized efforts and methods locally, state-wide, country-wide and worldwide. Contributions include: wildlife, afforestation with indigenous, at times very rare trees, soil preservation, water conservation, ground water recharge, sustainable agriculture, preservation of local culture, supporting villagers quality of life and well-being.

Still calling for proactive action and progress, these efforts, benefitting the bioregion and its population, are recognized and supported nationally but also by worldwide government organizations through various programs and endorsements.

The present kind of actions and unconsidered planned development - brutal, violent, destructive - is not integrative and is putting Auroville's ground reality, its gained experience and substantial benefits, in jeopardy - whatever the justification given. It is as well as a denial and weakening of the values and exemplary practices, knowledge, solutions and models Auroville has developed in response to harmful urban, industrial and rural activities, ultimately resulting in climate changes humanity and Nature are confronted with.

There is still a long way to go - true, before the City the Earth Needs is manifested - strong opposition of views still prevailing. And an even stronger impetus is necessary to prevent falling into inertia and decline. Nevertheless, enforcement is not inducing Human Unity and trust. What is already established, vivid, healthy and good today must be preserved and integrated to ensure a harmonious tomorrow.

I strongly recommend that in the present planning process the participation of residents is included, local adjustments to address specific issues are made and flexibility in the overall planning approach, in full accordance with Mother's indications for Auroville, is shown. Experience has proven that such practice is addressing issues successfully and prevents conflicts.

With regard to the ongoing decisions one can observe that such practices are absent from these processes. Requests for a more inclusive approach, often based on practical experience, ground observation and solid scientific evidence, are systematically disregarded.

This is, in my understanding, in contradiction with the very aim of Auroville, ultimately impairing its manifestation.

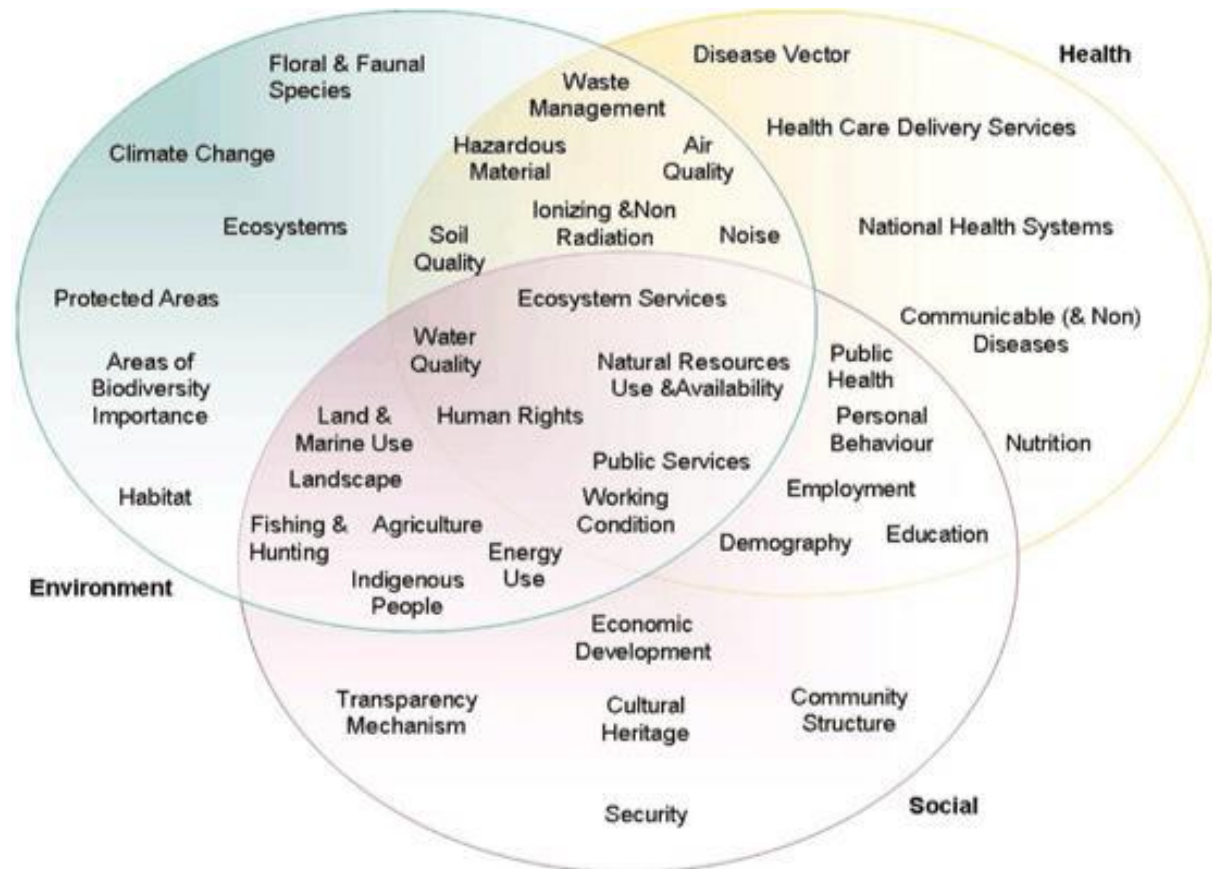
Some tools and practices may help to sort out of this dead end.

Under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, India notified its first Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) norms in 1994, setting in place a legal framework for regulating activities that access, utilize, and affect natural resources. Every development project has been required to go through the EIA process for obtaining prior environmental clearance ever since. The social impacts of a project are the direct and indirect impacts that affect people and their communities during all stages of the project lifecycle. If they are not addressed, a project may create conflicts. To amicably solve such conflicts and to

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achieve a sustainable and inclusive development Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is

an effective tool. The SIA with its components is an integral part of EIA studies.



Topics to be covered in different impact assessment types:

Environment / Social / Health

Source: link.springer.com

Environmental Impact Assessment and Social Impact Assessment are therefore not a choice but a necessity for Auroville's development processes, prior to consolidating any planning, DDP, moreover implementation for any significant development such as the Crown, Outer Ring Road, Radials and large buildings in Auroville.

Consideration for social and environmental protection is not a luxury; it is a necessity (and a legal obligation) for the benefit of all, present and future.

G.B.

Aurovilian

12/12/2021

APPENDIX 22

Personal statement by an out-of-station member of the Working Committee

15 December 2021

Although I am currently TOS and have been since Oct. 8th, I have been hearing and reading about the recent events in Auroville from multiple sources, as well as seeing pictures and video footage. Real pain, sorrow, frustration and, at times, fear are starkly visible in the images and can be felt in all the many communications I have seen. These events have left me deeply shocked and saddened, and feeling great concern for the Dream of Auroville, the Auroville that I and so many others came to try to build, grow and be a part of, to serve the spiritual call of Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The Galaxy Concept is a beautiful one, and I am not against the Master Plan as a perspective and framework. However, I don't believe it was intended to be a fixed or static plan and it is in fact stated on pg 84 that "Although the Master Plan (Perspective 2025) indicates a time horizon of 25 years, it will neither be traditional nor static and rigid." (Full quote of the paragraph is reproduced below.) Having read the transcripts of the interviews of Roger and having a lifelong connection with Mother, I don't believe they were rigid or fixed either, as can be seen in the many available writings and documented interviews. (From an interview with Roger: *"People come here to live the experience and it is from this experience that their living conditions, their environment will be created. Q. So Auroville may never be finished, then? R. Perhaps not, but that has absolutely no importance. What is important is not to build a city, it is to build, I repeat, a new humanity. Having said that, how much delay and how much time it will take, only the future will show us. I hope it will be soon!"*)

But for me being for or against the Master Plan is not the point. The point is how we live together, how we develop together, how we make decisions together, act together, treat each other. And the physically aggressive actions involving JCB's and busloads of police in the middle of the night and then JCB's and a large group of hired outsiders behaving like gundas during the day after an agreement had been reached, and all of this planned behind closed doors between the Secretary and Aurovilians against other Aurovilians ... this is simply not justifiable. How can we claim to be aspiring and working towards an "actual human unity" and "peace and progressive harmony" while carrying out, ordering or condoning violence, aggression, threats, intimidation and literal bulldozing because of internal disagreements?

I was present at the Inauguration, I grew up in Auroville most of my childhood and have spent most of my adult life in service to the Dream, to the aims and the ideals, and have lived in all its realities, the beautiful and hopeful as well as the discouraging, disappointing and frustrating ones. I believe with all my heart and soul that this authoritarian approach using external entities to force contentious development, or anything else, is not the way for Auroville, and goes against its spirit, its aims and its ideals.

Another point I would like to address is that of participation by residents in major decision-making. I believe every resident, no matter their perspectives or opinions, should have the chance to participate and it is reasonable to expect the Working Committee to allow and support that process. Quoting pg 9, 20(1), of the Auroville Foundation Act, *"There shall be a Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly which shall assist the Residents' Assembly or, as the case may be, the Governing Board, in discharging its duties under this Act."* I believe the Working Committee, of which I am currently a member, is primarily accountable to the Residents' Assembly and must put aside individual preferences and positions to give the RA its voice in organized decision-making processes, even if many of Auroville's processes are still far from perfect. Auroville, its processes and its residents are very much 'works in progress', and therefore so is the Working Committee, but it must

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represent the RA to the best of its ability and, ideally, try to synthesize all of the diversity of views and positions in our complex community without resorting to force.

I hope and pray that this kind of thing never happens again among us, that it is agreed that divisive forces and tactics are unacceptable in Auroville, that the deep hurt and wounds and rifts that have been caused will be acknowledged as something real and regrettable, that we can all dig deep and find a way to build the city and walk the path of an evolution of consciousness in a spirit of creativity, exploration, experimentation, flexibility, pragmatism and open-mindedness, with all our diversity and differences, while acknowledging and embracing our common love and commitment to The Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

C.G.

Although the Master Plan (Perspective 2025) indicates a time horizon of 25 years, it will neither be traditional nor static and rigid. In the framework of Perspective 2025, the Planning Group would prepare a detailed Five Year Development Plan containing the priority item to be taken for development as given in Table 22. At the close of the first Five Year Development Plan, the progress would be assessed. A second phase detailed development plan would then be prepared on the basis of the feedback obtained from the field/ monitoring which will be followed by further detailed development plans for subsequent years and period. (Pg 84 of the Auroville Master Plan, Perspective 2025)

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22 December 2021

Vikalp Sangam Supports an Auroville Free to Continue its Experiments on Sustainability and Harmony

We are deeply disturbed by reports from the experimental township of [Auroville](#) (a living UNESCO world heritage site), that unique forests, water catchment areas, community spaces are being bulldozed, and most importantly of all, community processes being ignored and bypassed. All this is being done in the name of “development” and a narrative that those who have been speaking for the forests, waterways and community processes have been standing in its way. The website www.standforaurovilleunity.com documents the unfolding of events in Auroville, and the responses from within the community and outside.

As videos and photographs show, about two weeks back, bulldozers flanked by police started clearing a forest bypassing due consensus-building processes within the community, which is among the founding principles of Auroville. This included a night-time raid at Auroville’s Youth Centre by nearly 80 policemen, involving police aggression, followed days later by forceful demolition of the centre’s main structures by involving nearly 100 hired strangers and violence at the hands of some. Residents who have raised the alarms have been threatened with gagging orders, deportation, FIRs, and denied the freedom of speech and the freedom to protest.

This kind of aggression imposed in an international intentional community, known for its [innovations](#), is unacceptable and risks undoing much of what Auroville has offered and may continue to offer to India and the world. It jeopardises Auroville’s future relevance for our country and the world. People cannot innovate when they live in fear of violence and deportation.

We recognise the key role that Auroville has played in the research and design of systems of food production, ecological restoration, natural healthcare, education, architecture, and [watershed-sensitive town planning](#). It has been an inspiration for numerous ecological projects and practices across India and the world during the past 40 years. Two years ago, we, members of Vikalp Sangam, gathered in Auroville with leading pioneers in the sustainability movement to [re-imagine pathways for economy and governance](#) that fit today’s global challenges, such as rampant inequality and the ecological (including climate) crisis. We have since been continuing our collaboration in small ways and working towards deepening our relationship with the community in a spirit of mutual learning and offering.

We understand that the present situation is the precipitate of a long-term unresolved conflict within the community regarding the development of a major circular road around the centre of Auroville called the Crown Way. We learn that while the administration, supported by a group of residents in positions of power, have been imposing the implementation of a plan that has been found to result in serious social and ecological damage, the community has made alternative proposals accommodating the ground realities, with minor adjustments to the road. We also learn

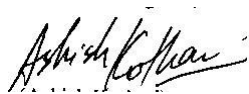
APPENDIX 23

that these alternative proposals, backed by detailed studies and plans and led by well-accomplished and internationally renowned urban planners living in and associated with Auroville, have been repeatedly ignored.

It is apparent that for decades, Auroville's residents and government representatives have operated in a delicate balance of power, enshrined in the Auroville Foundation Act 1988. It appears now that this balance is being destroyed, with top-down decisions emanating from the central government, decisions that are oriented towards fast-track urban construction at the cost of community participation, consensus and ecological integrity. At a time when the world is asking questions about the currently dominant 'development' mindset because of its unsustainability and inequity, we fear that such imposition will undermine the role of Auroville as a site for innovation towards collective creativity and harmony.

As a civil society, we are inspired by the unique experiment in Auroville towards self-organisation and localised governance; an aspiration that has been growing across India and the world. Many aspects of it still need to be worked out, but that is to be expected in a situation where residents converge from many nationalities and cultures and have to work out the intricacies of genuine democracy. Instead of using its inadequacies and challenges as the rationale for such a top-down imposition, we urge all concerned to help strengthen the Auroville Residents Assembly, enable its empowerment to function to its full potential and become a true instrument of the collective labour towards the creation of the 'City of Dawn' that it aspires to be.

We support the residents' plea to drop plans and processes of the imposed land clearance, and to instead enable a process of true collaboration and co-creation for deciding on what is the best interest of people and the environment in Auroville. The Vikalp Sangam stands for a pluriverse of pathways towards well-being and development, and we need Auroville as an autonomous laboratory for evolving such pathways through collective living and work.



(Ashish Kothari) ashishkothari@riseup.net
On behalf of the Vikalp Sangam Core Group

Endorsed by members of Vikalp Sangam Core Group, listed below alphabetically. The Vikalp Sangam process is a platform to bring together movements, groups and individuals working on just, equitable and sustainable pathways to human and ecological well-being. It rejects the current model of development and the structures of inequality and injustice underlying it, and searches for alternatives in practice and vision. Over 80 movements & organisations around the country are involved. For more information:

<http://www.vikalpsangam.org/about/>

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Members of Vikalp Sangam Core Group

1. ACCORD
2. Adivasi Live Matter
3. AGRAGAMEE
4. Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA)
5. Alternative Law Forum
6. Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE)
7. BHASHA
8. Bhoomi College
9. Blue Ribbon Movement
10. Centre for Education and Documentation (CED)
11. Centre for Environment Education (CEE)
12. Centre for Equity Studies (CES)
13. Centre for Financial Accountability
14. CGNetSwara
15. Chalakudypuzha Samrakshana Samithi / River Research Centre
16. Deccan Development Society (DDS)
17. Deer Park
18. Development Alternatives (DA)
19. Desert Resource Centre
20. Dharamitra
21. Dinesh Abrol
22. Ekta Parishad
23. Ektha
24. EQUATIONS
25. Extinction Rebellion India
26. Gene Campaign
27. Goonj
28. Greenpeace India
29. Health Swaraj Samvaad
30. Ideosync
31. India and Bharat Together (IABT)
32. Jagori Rural
33. Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat
34. Kalpavriksh
35. Knowledge in Civil Society (KICS)
36. Kriti Team
37. Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO)
38. Let India Breathe
39. Local Futures
40. Maadhyam
41. Maati
42. MAKAAAM
43. Mahalir Association for Literacy Awareness and Rights (MALAR)
44. Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan
45. National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (NAPM),
46. National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)
47. National Coalition for Natural Farming
48. Nirangal
49. Non-timber Forest Produce Exchange
50. North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS)
51. Ovais Sultan Khan
52. People's Resource Centre
53. Peoples' Science Institute (PSI),
54. reStore
55. Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network
56. Sahjeevan
57. Sambhaavnaa
58. Samvedana
59. Sangama
60. Sangat
61. School for Democracy
62. School for Rural Development and Environment
63. Shikshantar
64. Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC-II)
65. Sikkim Indigenous Lepcha Women's Association
66. Social Entrepreneurship Association
67. SOPPECOM
68. South Asian Dialogue on Ecological Democracy (SADED)
69. Students' Environmental and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL)
70. Sushma Iyengar
71. Thanal Trust
72. The Himalaya Collective
73. The Youth Collective (CYC)
74. Timbaktu Collective
75. Titli Trust
76. Travellers' University
77. Tribal Health Initiative
78. URMUL
79. Vrikshamitra
80. Watershed Support Services and Activities Network
81. Youth Alliance
82. Yugma Network

APPENDIX 24

An experienced Aurovilian challenges misrepresentations made by ATDC in the Residents' Assembly meeting of December 20

23 December 2021

There were three extraordinary claims made in the Residents' Assembly Meeting on Monday:

- Claim #1: The Master Plan has the first Detailed Development Plan (DDP) included in it, so we don't need a new DDP to start work.
- Claim #2: Work on the Crown Road does not need a DDP.
- Claim #3: "We" have delayed or blocked DDPs for the last 20 years.

Without going into the logical inconsistencies among the three claims, my non-expert understanding is as follows:

Claim #1: Not true. Read section 2.11.1 of the Plan, which says: "In the framework of Perspective 2025, the Planning Group would prepare a detailed Five Year Development Plan containing the priority items to be taken up for development as given in Table 22. At the close of the first Five Year Development Plan, the progress will be assessed. A second-phase detailed development plan would then be prepared on the basis of the feedback obtained from the field/monitoring which will be followed by further detailed development plans for subsequent five-year periods."

Claim #2: Not true. A road connects places; supports a certain volume and nature of traffic; has daily, weekly and seasonal variations in traffic; touches and supports activities on its two sides; and passes over (or under) specific physical and ecological features. A road cannot be built without a detailed plan that addresses each of these aspects.

Claim #3: Not true. As far as I know, the Residents' Assembly has not protested, petitioned or decided against any DDP in the past, nor is it doing so now. If efforts at creating a DDP have been delayed or derailed in the past, we need to know who was responsible for that.

Can we please have responses from our expert planners and architects regarding these three claims? I am happy to be corrected.

M.C.

APPENDIX 25

The Bioregion of Auroville: A Note

The international township of Auroville is not an island — it is planted squarely amidst five villages in Tamil Nadu's Villupuram district. These villages — Alankuppam, Edyanchavadi, Kottakarai, Kulilapalayam, Sanjeevinagar, with a combined population of approximately 16,000 people — are situated in the greenbelt ring which is supposed to surround the Auroville city area. With seven other villages located slightly further afield, these 12 villages in the immediate area of Auroville comprise about 40,000 people. Altogether there are some 40 villages in the larger bioregional area.

Since its founding in 1968, Auroville has had an enormous impact on its surrounding area. This impact is physically visible in the villages, for example in vastly improved housing conditions, also in easier access to water supply and drinking water, and to employment.

Over the last 54 years, these villages have grown side by side with Auroville, supporting its growth and development both physically with labour as also with mutual sharing of knowledge. Vast employment opportunities have been the biggest benefit for the bio-region. On a daily basis, about 6,000 persons from the surrounding villages come to work in various units, services, houses, farms, schools etc. of Auroville. They participate in, share in and imbibe Auroville's values every day.

Additionally, there have been about 35 different Outreach programmes conducted by Auroville in the surrounding bioregion. Among the most impactful are the Auroville-supported schools, which offer educational programs that include sports and extracurricular activities (only five charge nominal fees); there are presently 14 schools and educational activities conducted in different villages. Other Auroville programmes provide promising village children support, mentoring for higher education and training programmes in various fields; thus, there has been a huge leap in education opportunities, particularly for girls. A side effect of this is that the bioregion has a high proportion of women driving two-wheelers.

Another important impact is the largely unseen action and effect of women empowerment, with the existence of 320 women self-help groups consisting of 5,200 women from 78 settlements in the bioregion.

Other important areas of impact include:

- Water catchments, village tank restoration work and maintenance done by Auroville;
- Handicraft skills have widely disseminated into the region because of training in Auroville handicraft units;
- Young people prefer to stay and work in the Auroville region rather than migrate to cities because they appreciate the green environment and also the freedom of working in Auroville;
- Just-married women from surrounding villages begin to persuade their new husbands to come and live in their maternal villages because of better employment opportunities and, more importantly, a better quality of life with the greenery and health consciousness — a gradual change from old patriarchal patterns of thought and social practice;
- A return to traditional and local knowledge of medicinal plants and healing, an awareness of the importance of well-being and alternative medicine such Siddha and Ayurveda;
- Many Auroville units do a seminal work in their own areas of work, for example with medicinal or indigenous plants, but equally by running programs of education for visiting schools.

Of course, much else remains to be done.

It is important that planning and development in Auroville should take into account the welfare and well-being of people living in these surrounding villages.

TAMIL NADU

Auroville residents protest uprooting of trees for contentious Crown Project



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

VILLUPURAM, DECEMBER 04, 2021 12:00 IST
UPDATED: DECEMBER 04, 2021 12:00 IST

SHARE ARTICLE f t w e m p PRINT A | A | A

The Town Development Council has been tasked with evolving an action plan for the project.

Over 300 residents of Auroville on Saturday resorted to a protest after around 30 trees were uprooted in the core area of the International township to pave way for laying a road for the contentious Crown project.

The project envisages establishment of four zones - industrial, cultural, residential and recreational - growing radially out of the Matrimandir, the soul of the township.

The Town Development Council has been tasked with evolving an action plan for the project.

A member of Auroville's Resident Assembly, on anonymity, said the Crown Project has been a contentious issue in the community for years and the move to uproot trees with earthmovers has come as a shock to the residents.

"Trees are being uprooted without following due community process. The community has not agreed to this and some groups in Auroville are trying to destroy our forests and go ahead with the project," he charged.

"An Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) was done by the community and we had even suggested an alternative route for the project, which is financially less costly and would work fine for their purposes," another member of the Resident Assembly said.

But the Town Development Council and the Auroville Foundation are going ahead with the project despite not being approved by the residents. "The earthmovers have left and we have ended the protest. The Resident Assembly will now sit and discuss the next course of action," the member said.

THE HINDU

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Trending in Tamil Nadu

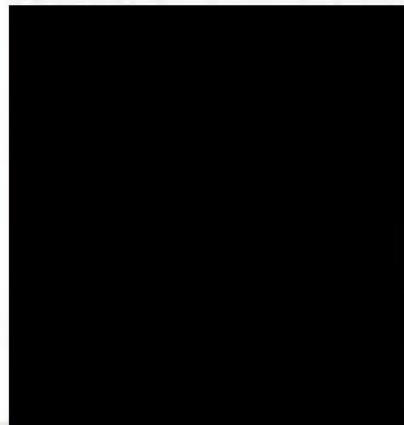
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TAMIL NADU

Aurovillians continue with protest against road laying, work halted



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

VILLUPURAM, DECEMBER 05, 2021 11:32 IST
 UPDATED: DECEMBER 05, 2021 11:43 IST

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Aurovillians protest against road laying for the Crown Project in Auroville in Villupuram district on December 5, 2021. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

The impasse between the protesting residents and the TDC has been continuing

Residents of Auroville continued with their protest in the wee hours of Sunday as the Town Development Council (TDC) and the Auroville Foundation again brought in earthmovers and cleared a few metres for laying of a road for the Crown Project. The work was again stopped due to protests.

The project envisages the establishment of four zones – industrial, cultural, residential and recreational – growing radially out of the Matrimandir. The Town Development Council has been tasked with evolving an action plan for the project.

The impasse between the protesting residents and the TDC has been continuing as the Resident Assembly has suggested an alternative route for the project.

According to a member of Auroville's Resident Assembly, "We are just asking that community process be followed. There is a process in which we make decisions as a community and which is approved in the Resident Assembly. This process has not been followed and they (Auroville Foundation) keep saying that we are blocking development."

She added: "On the contrary we are not actually blocking development. We have made proposals and want to discuss them as a community. But they are refusing to discuss it and instead bulldozing their way through. The Town Development Council are dividing some members of our Working Group together with the Foundation."

Trending in Tamil Nadu

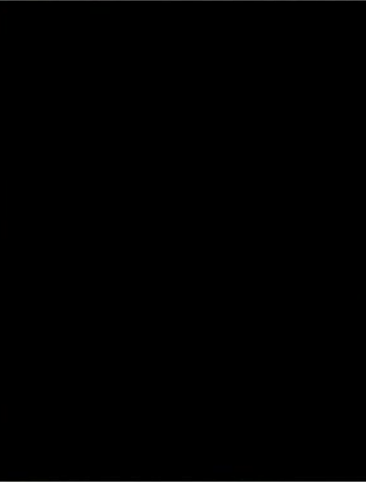
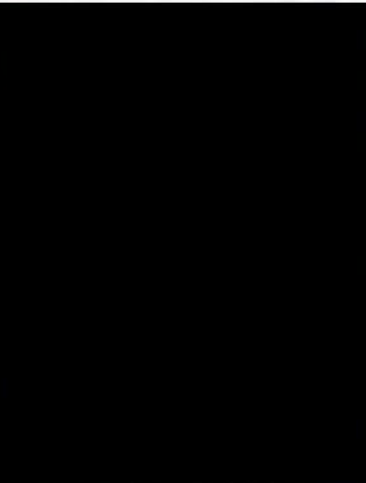
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Tamil Nadu Aurovillians continue with protest against road laying, work halted



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According to her, "The TDC brought in earthmovers on Saturday to clear trees for laying the road and we blocked them. The Resident Community has made it clear that we cannot allow any work till we sit down and discuss. Without any notification or consent at 1 a.m. again they sent earthmovers with the police this time and blocked the roads so that we could not reach the venue."

"Though Aurovillians managed to reach the place, the damage had already been done. We are not trying to impose our view. All we want is go through a process and whatever the collective decides, we will go through. There are a few persons in power who are not cooperating and causing a lot of havoc" alleged another member of the Assembly.

According to an Aurovillian, "the Foundation organised everything beforehand and brought in police to the contentious place. The police intimidated and dragged the protestors and tried to take them into the police vehicle."

He saw this as a typical conflict between "faithful and reason". The former, he said, believe that the road has to be built whatever cost because this is what The Mother (Mirra Alfassa) had endorsed for the Master Plan while the other group is of the opinion that it is difficult to build the city in this manner.

"We are not against the Road but only suggest to change the routes since it is not environmental friendly. The way the Foundation has been acting against the residents with the police is not acceptable. The two groups can disagree on opinions but violence is not acceptable," he said.

When contacted Superintendent of Police N. Shreenatha clarified that no police personnel manhandled any resident of Auroville. "They decided to lay the road and requested for police protection. They had cleared a few metres in the early hours of today when the residents again protested and the work was halted," he said.

(The Hindu has reached out to Members of the Auroville Foundation Governing Board. The copy will be updated if a response is received.)

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NGT Stays Tree Felling at Auroville as Residents Protest Road Project

The Villupuram police said they had no role to play in the demolition drive by locals at Auroville, near Puducherry.

SMITHA TK

Updated: 10 Dec 2021, 4:40 PM IST

INDIA

5 min read



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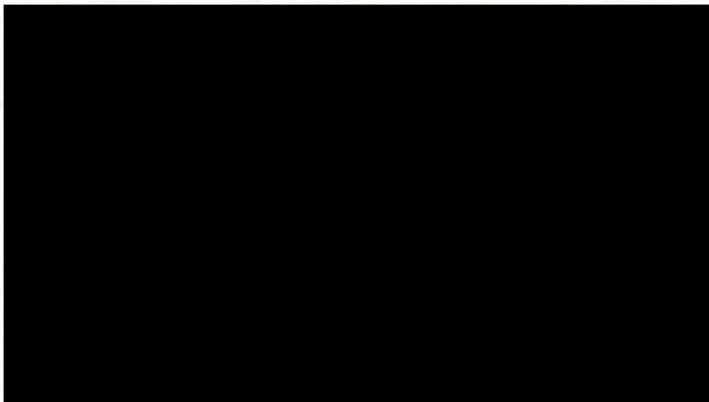
The National Green Tribunal has stayed the felling of trees at Auroville, a spiritual township in Tamil Nadu's Villupuram. The residents have been on protest path since a week after the township administration razed a building and fell trees for a road project.

On the morning of 9 December, several excavators arrived at the Youth Centre in Auroville – a spiritual township in Tamil Nadu's Villupuram, near Puducherry – to demolish buildings and cut down trees.

"We are distraught and helpless. We are fighting for our trees and land. All we are asking for is a dialogue."

Resident, Auroville

The NGT has posted the second hearing on the matter to 17 December.



Residents of Auroville said they are feeling helpless and threatened with JCBs entering their premises without following the due protocols.

(Photo: Accessed by The Quint)

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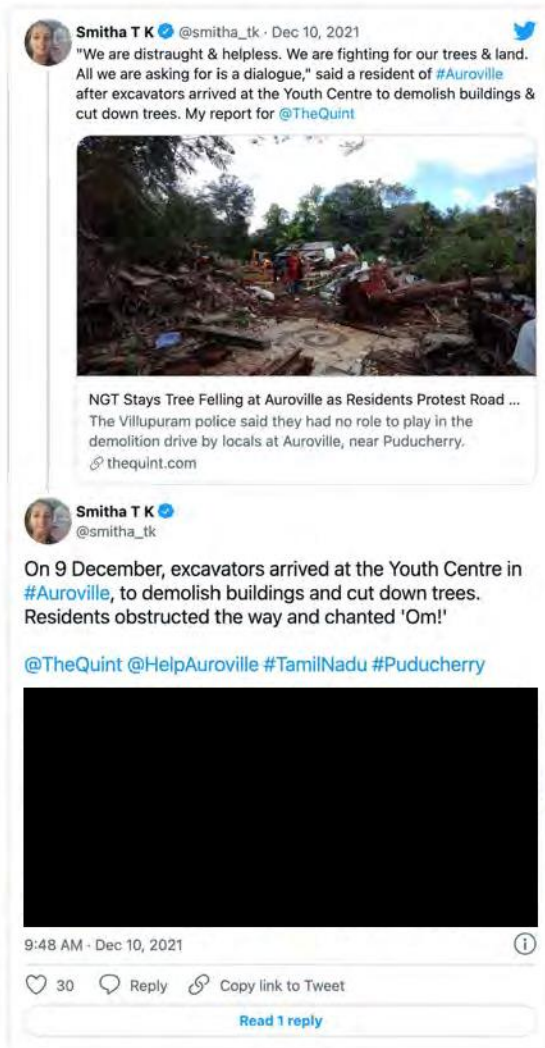
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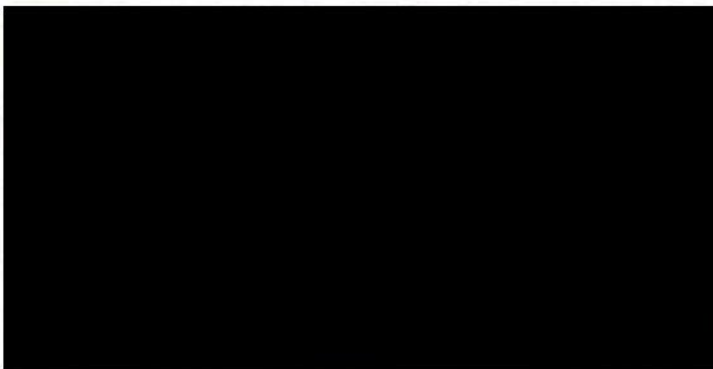
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The clearing is to make way for development of the Crownway – a 16.7 meters-wide peripheral road meant to be laid around Auroville. The Crownway was designed based on a masterplan.

The residents told **The Quint** that at 7 AM over 100 locals reached the location without any police escort. The people of the community rushed to the scene and held on to the JCBs in an attempt to stop them from demolishing.

In a personally drafted note to Dr Jayanthi Ravi, the secretary of the Auroville Foundation who was appointed by the Centre, a resident wrote, "I ask you to stop this action and the method you are applying to build the city of Auroville."



Residents alleged that locals manhandled the residents who were objecting to the trees being cut down.

(Photo: Accessed by The Quint)

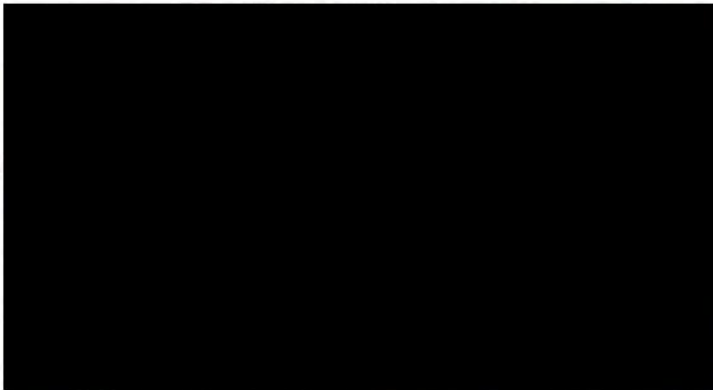
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Residents Allege Intimidation by Authorities

A similar incident happened on Saturday, 4 December, when the police came with 3 JCB earthmovers to clear the trees, a little past midnight, residents said.



Locals tried to form a circle around the spaces so as to stop the residents from interfering with the demolition.

(Photo: Accessed by The Quint)

"Some of the youngsters who were sleeping outside the centre and all of us were rattled. We couldn't even figure out what was happening as it was late in the night and everyone was sleeping in their respective houses," said a resident on the condition of anonymity.

Following protests, the police called the demolition off and urged the secretary to hold discussions with the Auroville residents.

On 5 December, around 500 residents met peacefully and decided to request the community's internal planning body to pause the development work until further notice from the Residents Assembly.

"First, the secretary called the youth and asked them for their opinion and they strongly objected to it," a resident alleged.

"But later a compromise was arrived at between the secretariat, a member of Auroville's planning body, a member of the working committee and a few residents," read a statement from the residents. An ultimatum was issued to the Youth Centre, which stated that clearance will be carried out even if they do not agree to it. The Youth Centre agreed "to work towards peace and progressive harmony" and agreed that they will clear out the area themselves. The management, however, did not wait for this, the residents allege.

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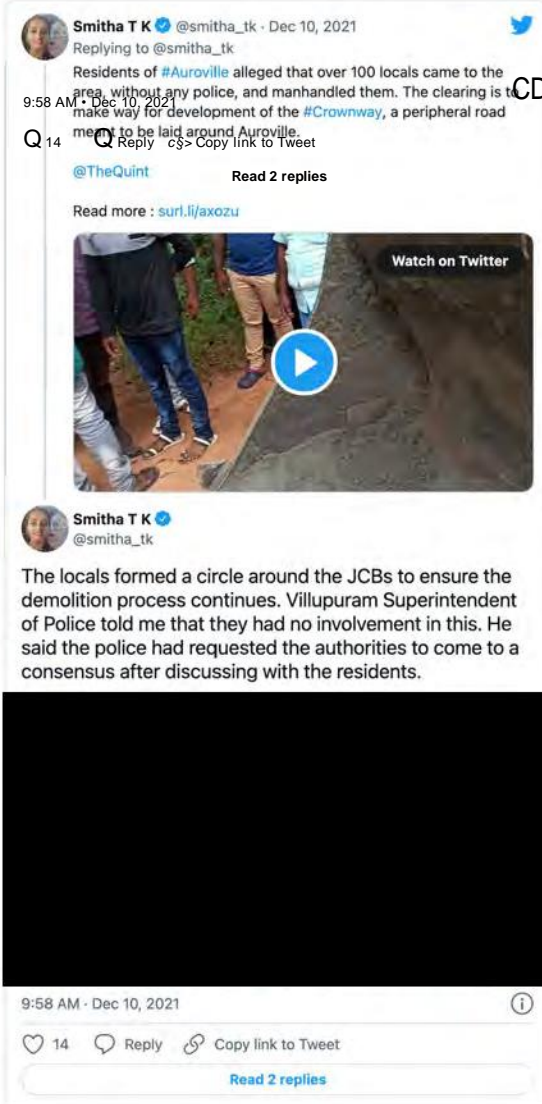
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Police Deny Involvement

Villupuram Superintendent of Police A Shreenatha told **The Quint**, "We are aware that the residents are not okay with this plan so we urged them to hold a dialogue and come to a consensus. We said we will not interfere in the matter until then."

He categorically denied allegations that the police sent locals to Auroville.



Smitha T K @smitha_tk · Dec 10, 2021
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Residents of #Auroville alleged that over 100 locals came to the area, without any police, and manhandled them. The clearing is to make way for development of the #Crownway, a peripheral road meant to be laid around Auroville.

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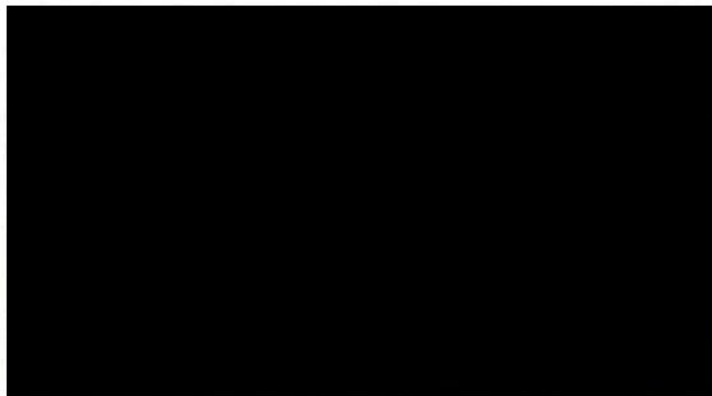
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The clearing is to make way for development of the Masterplan's Crownway – a 16.7 meters-wide peripheral road meant to be laid around Auroville.

(Photo: Accessed by The Quint)

"Today I climbed on top of the JCB which was working at the Youth Centre, and asked the driver to stop the machine. The driver was scared, he would have stopped. But 20 goondas surrounding the JCB, lifted me off and carried me away. Of course, in the process I got hurt physically, but that is not the point."

Resident, Auroville

Why Are Residents Opposing an Approved Plan?

The Auroville Universal Township Master Plan – Perspective 2025 was approved by the Human Resource Development Ministry in 2001 and notified in a Government of India gazette in 2010.



Residents alleged many were manhandled by the locals.

(Photo: Accessed by The Quint)

A resident explained that while the Auroville Master Plan was approved by The Mother – Mira Alfassa, founder of Auroville, the masterplan is no longer ecologically feasible.

Residents have alleged that the development plans, required under the Master Plan, are not agreed upon by the Residents Assembly and Governing Board. A resident felt this move by the authorities was a way of "belittling the collective decision-making process" of the community.

The Auroville Foundation is an autonomous body under the Central Government. The Residents Assembly is made up of the adult residents of Auroville and is one of the three authorities of the Auroville Foundation, as per the Auroville Foundation Act-1988.

"Human Unity will not be built by bringing police or goondas...You all know that but at this moment are blinded by the narrative of perfect circle and sacred geometry. Human Unity will be built by touching hearts, talking and solving and not being stuck in our positions," read a note by a resident.

"I object to the tactics of manipulation, subterfuge, divide and conquer, and obstinacy to the extent of using strongarm tactics," it read.

However a statement from the Auroville Foundation read that the Governing Board had met with residents and decided to proceed with the master plan, after considering the concerns of the groups. **The Quint** was unable to reach Jayanthi

Ravi for an official comment.

The residents told **The Quint** that they had proposed an alternate plan in the past but it was rejected, without citing reasons.

"We are not opposing the plan. But the way it is being implemented. Brute force should not be used. We are shaken because the recent events contradict our peaceful way of living. Shouldn't we all come to a consensus before implementing projects that will impact our living," said a resident.

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Why Auroville Inhabitants Feel Their Human Unity Experiment Is Under Threat

In the middle of the eco-friendly habitat, residents have woken up to a shock of the construction of a Crownway road which threatens to damage the ambience of Auroville - a quaint experiment of Human Unity.



The Matri Mandir in Auroville | File Photo



Thufail PT

Published: 13 Dec 2021, Updated: 14 Dec 2021 8:44 am

Trending

Omicron Restrictions: States Impose Travel Curbs As Cases Surge

Rachna (name changed) came to Auroville 20 years ago to dedicate her life “to the path of inner discovery”. The well-known experimental township near Pondicherry was founded in 1968 by Mirra Alfassa

PRESS - 4

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(known as Mother to her followers) to realise human unity. But, Rachna and around 3500 other inhabitants, including foreign nationals, of Auroville are now in the middle of an existential struggle to protect the idea of their commune. At the heart of it is the construction of a Crownway road inside the Auroville forest. But the residents here say that for them it is much more than that.

“We are at Auroville to realise how the spirit can really shine through layers of social, moral, cultural and racial conditioning that exist in the outside world through the teachings of the Mother. The basic need for such a thing is freedom,” Rachna says.

But, past the midnight on December 4, Auroville’s residents felt that their freedom was at stake. The local police along with a group of outsiders came to the tranquil Auroville campus in the wee hours and started uprooting trees and demolishing the Youth Centre using JCB earthmovers for the road project. The residents alleged that the police assaulted the youngsters who were sleeping at the Youth Centre as well as those who came to protest.

The decision by the Auroville Foundaiton, an autonomous body, to go ahead with the construction of the road has met with stiff opposition from the residents here.



From The Magazine

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Manipur Under AFSPA: Poignant Stories Of Rape, Fake Encounter And Unending Wait For Justice

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PRESS - 4

Darkness At Noon: Stories Of Pain And Suffering In Battle-Scarred Kashmir

AFSPA: A Law That Is Discriminatory, Exclusionary, Racist

The fissures between the Auroville Foundation and the residents had started after the death of Mirra Alfassa. The Indian parliament enacted the Auroville Foundation Act in 1988. As per the Act, Auroville has three authorities- namely, the Governing Board, Resident Assembly and the Auroville International Advisory Council. The Governing Board comprises eminent personalities appointed by the government of India while the International Advisory Council is comprised of five internationally reputed persons, normally from different nations. The Resident Assembly has all the Auroville residents of age above 18 years as the members.

The residents have now alleged that the new secretary of the Foundation appointed by the Centre, Jayanti Ravi, a Gujarat-cadre IAS officer, has taken unilateral decisions without consulting the residents or taking them into confidence.

“The police action was a shock and trauma for the entire community. Auroville has never seen such violence before,” says Radhika (name changed) an inhabitant. “They even threatened to confiscate the foreign inmates’ visas and passports,” Radhika said.

“We continued our peaceful and silent protest. On December 10, we managed to get an interim stay from the National Green Tribunal on constructing the Crown Road till December 17,” Radhika said. But the tension lingers.

“We are not against development. We are only saying that let’s follow the community processes and let’s talk,” Radhika said, adding, “We want to stop tree cutting and we want to stop violence.”





Auroville was founded by Mirra Alfassa, a French occultist who lived between the years 1878-1973, and who was a spiritual partner of the Indian Guru Sri Aurobindo with an aim to fulfill the latter's vision of human progress and spiritual evolution. Several people from all across the world came to Auroville and settled there in response to the call for building the city of humanity.

"It was a barren red land when people came here 50 years ago," Radhika says. "There was no water and the people started planting trees and cultivated a forest here, which has now grown organically ensuring water security in Pondicherry and other neighbouring bio regions."

Another resident, 82-years-old Frederick Schulze Buxloh from Germany recalls he had landed up in the Mother's ashram in 1960. "I was born in 1939, just before the Second World War started. I did not have any direct experience of the war. But I have had great problem in the aftermath understanding what actually processed the German race to commit such brutality. This was the reason why I came to India.

There were four persons who influenced me at that time- Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and Vivekananda. I spent six months in the ashram and met the Mother regularly. From 1961 to 1966 I studied philosophy in Germany. In 1966, I came back and started working for the preparation of the inauguration of Auroville. I have been in Auroville since 1968 that makes it over 54 years."

"What's happening right now is shaking me to the core. It's a danger to the mother's dream," he says.

"It brings tears to my eyes. We have dedicated our lives to this experiment for human unity. They are my children and grandchildren. They are standing in front of heavy machineries, being manhandled and harassed. It breaks my heart. It kills the spirit of Auroville," he says.

"India has given us shelter. There is no other country that has the wisdom and tolerance to allow something like this. I don't want to blame one side or the other. Don't super impose a rigid ideological template on us. This is our prayer," he concludes.



'Development in Auroville Should Not Happen at the Cost of Ecological Balance'

'We are not against the Crown Project, but it should not disturb the eco-sensitive zone'

KUNDHAVI DEVI
Published: 16 Dec 2021, 4:14 PM IST
MY REPORT
4 min read

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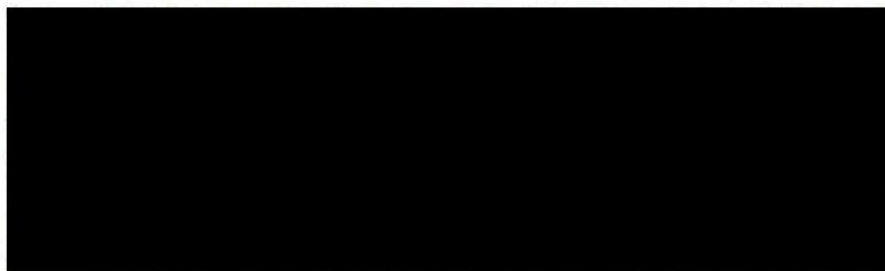
Video Producer: Maaz Hasan
Video Editor: Rajbir Singh

What comes to your mind when you hear of Auroville? A sustainable city in Tamil Nadu's Villupuram district? But it isn't just that! The area that everyone sees, wasn't so 55 years ago. It was a barren land and it became sustainable only because of the idea of realising human unity.

For the last week or so, this idea seems to be under threat.

On 9 December, we woke up to an overwhelming scene at Auroville. JCB earthmovers were brought to the Darkali Forest by the Auroville Foundation, which is run by the central government, to uproot the trees for the construction of ring road, called Crown Road, around the city.

As residents of the city, we were in utter shock and disbelief! Trees that took years to grow, forests that took decades to come up were being destroyed by giant machines. Without giving a second thought, we protested around the earthmovers to stop the destruction.



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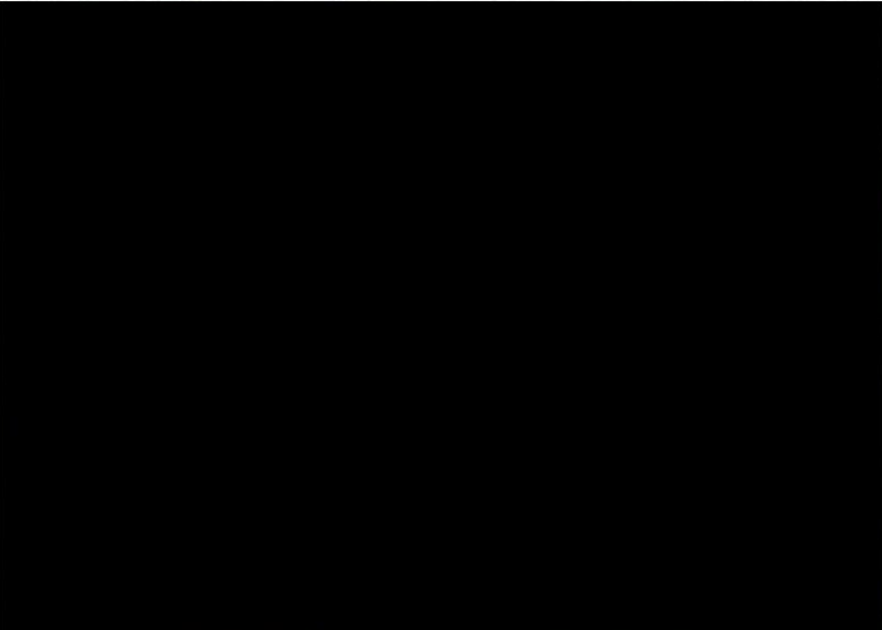
Aurovillians protesting against the uprooting of trees

"There was a general agreement that this crown corridor, which is a 75-metre-wide circular corridor that runs across the town is for different activities like park, recreation cultural, educational, and residential (purposes). Within the crown, there is something which is called the Right of Way, which is 16-metre wide. And within that 16-metre-wide, Right of Way, there is a 6-metre road. Residents and the caretakers of Darkali Forest (in Auroville) suggested that roads should be according to the environmental needs and realities of today. They asked if the roads can meander and save as many trees as possible and can respect the watersheds and ponds which have been created over time."

Hemant, Resident

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The same issue came with the Youth Centre. There have been meetings and discussions around the development of the centre into vocational skill training centres. Everyone was in agreement with the plan and then arrived the JCBs. It started removing trees and building on the Right of Way at the Youth Centre and the adjoining forest.



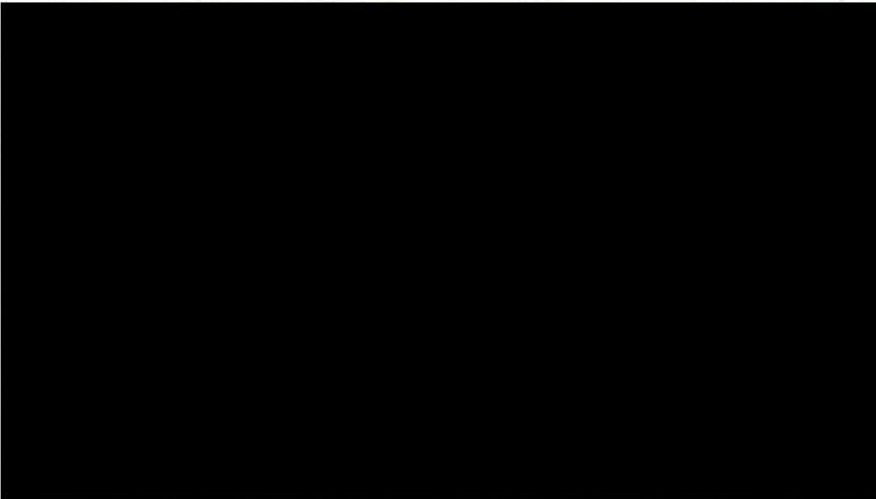


An earthmover uprooting trees in Auroville

"When people came here to see what's going on and walked this path, where the road is planned, and when they saw the alternative proposal (of the road) is just a few metres away, everyone was in shock. When there is a possibility to build the road here, why go through such a beautiful forest? There is a powerful force of oppression that is not listening to the voices of the people but is coming in and bulldozing their way through."

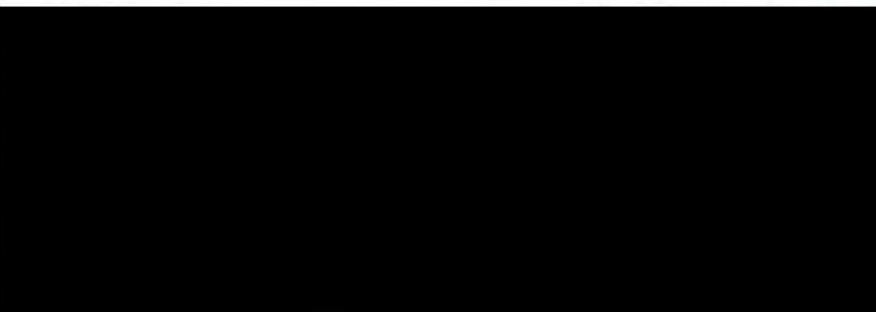
Natasha, Resident

As residents, we are aware that there is a master plan, which includes this Crown Project, for Auroville that was suggested in 1999. But the foundation needs to understand that since then, a lot of developments have taken place to preserve the ecology of the region.



Aurodam, a water catchment in the Auroville forest

We have had more than seven-and-a-half feet of rain in the last one month, but I haven't heard anything being flooded. This is because of watershed management. We have bandhs, check dams, ponds, and paths for water to flow. All the water is going to the ground and the aquifer is being recharged. Much wildlife can be seen over here. We have more than 150 species of birds. It's very important to take all this into consideration before ploughing through them.





The sustainable city will collapse if we disturb its ecology



Auroville being an eco-sensitive zone, felling of tree would affect the birds too.

We can avoid the conflict if we put our perceptions aside and find a way forward, together. We are looking forward to having a collaborative approach of the developmental project so that peace and harmony can be restored.

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Auroville Foundation's Response

The recently appointed Auroville Foundation Secretary Dr. Jayanti Ravi with the backing of the Governing Board of Auroville Foundation has taken decisive steps towards the development of the Auroville Township in accordance with the Auroville Master Plan through the Auroville Town Development Council.

These developments include roads and infrastructure corridors in an effort to give momentum to the manifestation of the city of Auroville, which has remained stalled for several decades.

Certain Auroville residents have blocked the advancement of work with the use of physical force and verbal abuse towards the work team and the police, under the guise of ecological concerns, despite an extensive community process where these concerns were thoroughly addressed.

The issue has been filed at the National Green Tribunal (NGT) which has granted interim stay on the project and the matter would be heard again on 17 December.

(All 'My Report' branded stories are submitted by citizen journalists to **The Quint**. Though **The Quint** inquires into the claims/allegations from all parties before publishing, the report and the views expressed above are the citizen journalist's own. **The Quint** neither endorses, nor is responsible for the same.)

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Auroville tree felling: NGT stay order extended till January 3

The NGT's order against felling the trees was issued on December 17

By Lakshmi Subramanian

Updated: December 21, 2021 17:23 IST



via Twitter/SaveAuroville

The residents of Auroville township in Tamil Nadu's Villupuram district will now heave a sigh of relief. Their protests against the foundation bore fruit, with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) extending the ban on tree felling inside the Auroville, until the next court hearing on January 3.

The NGT's order against felling the trees was issued on December 17.

"We, as the residents of Auroville, now hope for a break from the recent wave of bulldozing by authorities (of endangered trees, important water bodies, and structures), which was accompanied by violence, threats, propaganda and other underhanded tactics, about which many reports continue to emerge."

They had already called for a pause to the destruction. An internal petition signed by more than 500 Auroville residents on December 5 requested postponement of the development work on the Crown

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Road 'Right of Way', until the Auroville community would arrive at a collective agreement on a practical way forward. Many residents emphasise that authorities are trying to bypass necessary steps set out in the Auroville Masterplan policy framework, such as the creation of the required Detailed Development Plans (DDPs), which have not yet been done. They emphasise that they want the planning process to be collaborative and environmentally conscious, in a way that recognises ground realities. The residents say that this approach is essential for the city of Auroville to truly be an example to the world.

"We have presented proposals for the crown corridor based on studies and analysis to the ATDC and Secretariat of the Auroville Foundation," says renowned architect and Auroville resident Suhasini Ayer, winner of the Green Solutions Award at COP2021. "We also offered to collaborate with the ATDC to work on a trajectory for the crown that takes into account their concerns for a Right of Way that accommodates the mobility and infrastructure needs, while integrating water sheds/topography and existing development. But unfortunately, there are people who believe that the crown must be a perfect circle as indicated in the schematic maps in the Auroville Master Plan (Perspective 2025), as they believe a perfect circle has the occult power to accelerate the development of Auroville. This belief is being exploited by some persons and the authorities to create conflict within Auroville, and to dismiss residents' and experts' environmental concerns. The only way forward is collaboration – this is what the majority of residents call for," she said.

Earlier, despite the protests by the residents, on December 5, more than 900 trees were bulldozed across 67 acres in Auroville. With the stay being extended by NGT the residents are hopeful that the tension and aggression will de-escalate and also make the authorities follow planning and development processes to build the city while best serving the aims and dream of Auroville residents.

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OPINION

URBAN

Debate | Why Auroville Needs to Be a Model of Exemplary Development Practice

What Aurovillians are asking for is a town planning process that upholds and reflects the ideals of 'the city the earth needs.'



Photo: Aleksandr Zykov/Flickr (CC BY-SA 2.0)



Lakshmi Venugopal
and Tejaswini Mistri-
Kapoor



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URBAN 24/DEC/2021

In her article on *The Wire*, Anu Majumdar has painted a picture of a “wilful blockade of the Master Plan by an organised group” in the international township of Auroville in Tamil Nadu. She claims that “no violence” occurred in authorities’ recent forceful bulldozing to implement the Crown way, a proposed 4-km circular road within Auroville.



Let's consider the facts, starting with a short account of two recent events.

It's around midnight on Saturday, December 5. JCB bulldozers leave the parking area in front of the office of the Secretariat of the Auroville Foundation, and make their way towards Auroville's Youth Centre. Members of Auroville's Working Committee – a body selected by the community to represent them, of which Anu Majumdar is a current member – and members of the Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC) are seen in the building in what appears to be a late-night meeting.

Soon after, the bulldozers crash through the forest close to the Youth Centre, where six scared young resident Aurovillians call out for help as the bulldozers head to demolish structures. As community members rush in on two-wheelers to support the youth, they are stopped at multiple police checkpoints that have been preemptively set up on all access roads. At the Youth Centre, police officers grab some of the youth and bundle them into a police vehicle, taking their phones.

At the height of the chaos, Working Committee members are called and asked to intervene (so was the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, who apparently hung up the phone). They succeed in halting the mayhem, and later publish individual statements reflecting how they were “shocked to the core” by the event, which aimed to forcibly implement the Crown way.



Photo: Abhijit Shylnath/Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

In a community meeting called the following day to process the traumatic events, over 500 Aurovillians signed a statement which asserted their commitment to peaceful, collaborative urban planning processes, and which rejected “violence, threats and actions which undermine community processes and our collective work.”

Despite this clear statement by the community to the authorities, the intimidation and aggressive tactics continued. In another appalling incident on December 9, bulldozers again arrived early morning at the Youth Centre, accompanied by large groups of people from outside the community, some of whom confirmed they were paid to physically

enforce the clearance. They proceeded to raze buildings to the ground and reportedly instigated violent scenes, despite the peaceful protest measures of the Auroville residents. Further bulldozing without necessary work orders and other aggressive measures took place within the week of December 4 to 10. During those six days, 900 trees were felled, some of them, preserved species.

Majumdar suggests that the conflict has largely been “orchestrated via media and petitions”, none of which had actually occurred before the midnight bulldozing (December 5). If anything contributed to a crisis situation, it was the lack of communication to residents from Auroville’s authorities, and those residents working closely with them, such as Majumdar.

So what is this conflict really about?

The crux of the ongoing conflict in Auroville is not about whether Auroville will develop, but about *how*. And if Auroville is to realize the vision of its founder, the Mother, of being “the city the earth needs”, its development practice ought to be exemplary. “If this is how we are going to build Auroville, which is supposed to be an expression of spiritual consciousness – in the middle of the night, in the presence of police – then this is not the Auroville that I want to live in,” shared a resident youth.



Photo: Aleksandr Zykov/Flickr (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Auroville’s Master Plan is based on a galaxy model developed in the 1960s by French architect Roger Anger, in collaboration with the Mother. After Mother’s time, this concept was developed into a Master Plan (1999, 2001). The plan takes the form of a policy framework or concept note, and it lacks the required Detailed Development Plans (DDPs) which are necessary to flesh out the plan’s sketches before moving towards implementation. The 20-year-old Plan also needs to be updated to take into account the present-day ground realities and environmental concerns. A number of Auroville residents with expertise in town planning have – in the spirit of collaboration – conducted studies in recent years and offered their integrative proposals to authorities.

In recent months, since the arrival of a new government-appointed Secretary to the Auroville Foundation, the pressure exerted by authorities on the Auroville community to implement the Master Plan has increased in intensity, and has focused on rapid development of the Crown way.

“Those who opposed development did not offer proposals that would successfully integrate with the Plan,” writes Majumdar.

This is simply false. The two most directly-affected communities within Auroville that lie on the Crown way (Darkali and Bliss Forest/Youth Centre) recently presented their alternative development proposals to ATDC, showing how the Crown concept could be slightly adapted to preserve precious forest and water catchment systems that are vital to the whole bioregion.

The Darkali stewards proposed an alternate route just a few meters away, in a proposal backed up with detailed maps and documentation, which would avoid their largest and oldest trees and would keep thriving water bodies intact. (Darkali alone harvests three million litres of fresh water, which can support the drinking requirements of one lakh people). Other alternative proposals presented by residents were elegant solutions that met the key criteria for the Crown Road as defined in the Master Plan.

However, Majumdar and Auroville authorities, including the ATDC – which lacks planning expertise and contains some members appointed in questionable processes – ignored these proposals. Instead, they assert that the Crown must manifest as a perfect circle shape, a symbolism which they allegedly believe has a particular power that will aid the spiritual evolution of Auroville.



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Instead of collaborating with the community in the planning process, the ATDC blindsided the community with sudden bulldozing. The furtive late-night meetings, lack of communication and sudden bulldozing suggests the covert manner in which some authorities and some community members are currently operating – against the values of a community that has long claimed to be an experiment in human

unity and collaboration.

Majumdar claims “there was no violence, and no one was hurt” in the process of clearing for the Crown, but numerous videos circulating on social media demonstrate that this is simply not true.

Majumdar has painted a picture of a “wilful blockade of the Master Plan by an organised group”, but other members of her own Working Committee team (the elected body) were unaware of these late-night arrangements for a sudden and forceful implementation of the Master Plan by a small group of Aurovilians who are not acting on behalf of the community.

The larger part of the community has requested a pause of all development on the Crown until further notice, to allow time to define a harmonious way forward. According to the *Auroville Foundation Act (1988)*, the Residents’ Assembly (one of the three authorities of the Auroville Foundation) is to consult in the formulation and implementation of the Master Plan (section 17 (e)). But Majumdar and others who feel frustrated that the physical development of the city is not happening fast enough are today claiming that a community decision-making process on this topic is illegitimate, and have attempted to override the Residents Assembly, whose role is enshrined in Indian law.

Majumdar claims that implementation of the Master Plan has been stalled for 20 years due to “trees, environmental and topographical concerns”. Yet the Master Plan 2001 itself states (in section 2.9.7) that an “Environmental Management process... will be integrated within all development, planning and urban design elements.” Rather than blocking the Master Plan, the community’s call for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) aims to ensure the plan is *upheld* in the best possible way. Auroville’s International Advisory Council has also called for the same.

Suhasini Ayer, one of Auroville’s leading architects and town planning consultants – who recently won the Green Solutions Award at COP26 for a residential project on the Crown – emphasises that the Master Plan itself is not being disputed. Her concern – shared by many Auroville residents and expert town planners – is the need for development to take into account the local (and global) challenges, notably ecological sensitivity and the need to preserve important water catchment areas, given the bioregion is on the brink of a water scarcity crisis. Today, if Auroville wants to demonstrate exemplary development, it needs to provide local solutions to such global challenges, in a truly participative way.





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Mobility plan and afforestation

While Majumdar claims that “Holding up the Crown would mean holding up the new pedestrian-friendly mobility, adding to the pollution”, a key concern amongst residents is that a mobility plan has not been done.

The already-developed stretches of the Crown Road have dramatically increased motorised traffic, therefore the mobility plan needs to consider how further development of the Crown will manage the anticipated increase in regional traffic wanting to use the Crown and other Auroville roads as a thoroughfare between two nearby highways.

The planned ‘right-of-way’ clearing of the Crown Road would also require the felling of approximately 150,000 trees and shrubs of Tropical Dry Evergreen forest species, some of which are endangered trees. Auroville’s re-afforestation work is globally-recognised for reviving this rare forest type, and any professional planners would integrate trees of value into development proposals. “What message does it send out to the world,” exclaimed one resident, “that in Auroville, we destroy forests to build a city?”

Majumdar has said in her article that the many of the 900 trees bulldozed last week were “deliberately being planted over sections of the Crown” as a way to block its development. While there is truth in her claim that the Youth Centre was intentionally placed years ago on the Crown Road, the other area that was bulldozed into last week, a forest sanctuary named Darkali, is another matter altogether.

In contrast to Majumdar’s claim that “trees were planted without consulting the plans for the area”, the stewards of Darkali had earlier, in accordance with the ATDC’s wishes, planted trees to the side of where the future Crown Road would be laid. They were then told in recent years by ATDC that the road had been moved (in the plan), and it would now run through the path of these special trees.





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The rigid interpretation and imposition of an outdated plan goes against the spirit of the original Master Plan itself, which states that it will “neither be traditional, nor static and rigid” (Master Plan Perspective 2025, section 2.11.1). The Plan has in-built review processes, including 5-yearly Detailed Development Plans – which have never been done. Rather than being against the Master Plan, as Majumdar portrays it, what Aurovillians are asking for is that the Master Plan actually be *respected and upheld* “as a visionary plan supported by a charter to hold an experiment”, by following processes designed for it to yield the development of a township that reflects and sustains the unique trajectory of an experimental society.

Majumdar mentions the French architect Roger Anger, saying that “Auroville cannot claim to stand for ‘human unity’ until the city announced and promised to the world in February 1968 is built together with agreements and concord.” Indeed, the majority of residents are attempting to move forward in this spirit of collaboration (despite authorities’ heavy-handed tactics), while keeping in mind Anger’s statement that the main aim of Auroville was to grow new human beings, and that the city would have to evolve in accordance with the evolution of consciousness of its residents.

In response to Majumdar’s statement that the recent Stay Order on clearing (issued by the National Green Tribunal) allegedly takes “the rest of Auroville and its hopes for the future hostage,” a youth of Auroville poignantly posted on Auroville’s online forum, “We can stand for human unity in so many ways that have nothing to do with building the city. But to say, we can only stand for human unity until the city is built, is holding our spiritual progress hostage.”

The “orchestrated” petitions that Majumdar refers to is most likely the global support that is now flowing towards the Auroville community for its commitment to building the city in a collaborative, peaceful and ecologically-sensitive manner – as the petition (currently at 33,000 signatures) and many letters from high-level dignitaries indicate.

If Auroville is to demonstrate exemplary development practice, it must find a way to:

- urbanise while upholding the exemplary ecological work it is known for today;
- uphold its uniquely participatory mode of decision-making, which is enshrined in Indian law (The Auroville Foundation Act 1988);
- be led by the ideals set forth in its Charter, which say that Auroville will be a place of “unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages” and “a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual human unity.”

The community’s own architects and urban planners are right now

undertaking a collaborative brain-storming process (the Dreamweavers method) to integrate the galaxy concept and Master Plan framework, while being sensitive to local conditions. They will soon offer their findings to ATDC and the Auroville Foundation, in the hope of fruitful collaboration with authorities.

Lakshmi Venugopal is an Auroville resident and an environmental sustainability professional focusing on environmental education, leadership, community climate adaptation and resilience. Tejaswini Mistri-Kapoor is a former member of Auroville's Town Development Council. An architect and designer, she has lived and worked in Auroville for the past 18 years.



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