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Auroville Bulletin 66

Farm and Forest maintenances cut, Visa pressure, Feedback needed on RAD proposals

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

Friday, 14 July 2023

Note: There are important actions to take at the end of each Bulletin, if you are reading on your phone you may need to click 'see more' to view the entire bulletin.

Please find a glossary of acronyms and terms used in this bulletin [here](#).

Urgent actions needed

- **Send feedback on the new RAD proposals:** You can find the proposals [here](#), and send your feedback through [this form](#). More information below.
- **Appeal for assistance:** Help is needed to support the community. If you have skills in the areas of admin and secretarial, writing, legal, research or media, please email evolvingalaxy@gmail.com
- **Switch to the new community-supported email system:** For more information on how to get a new @auroville.community email address, please [click here](#) or contact admin@auroville.community.
- **Support for forest workers' livelihoods:** As the Forest Group budget has been cut, more than 60 forest workers are without an income. If you would like to contribute to support them, email evolvingalaxy@gmail.com
- **BCC calls for support for Aurovilians:** An increasing number of Aurovilians, now including an additional 44 foresters, have been cut off from their maintenances due to unilateral decisions of the AVFO. The RA BCC still seeks to support these people. If you can help, please see [here](#) for more information, and email BCC on bccoffice@auroville.services or bccauroville@gmail.com.
- **Financial support for legal fees:** If you can donate towards legal and delegation fees, please email evolvingalaxy@gmail.com. Please see [here](#) for more information about why further financial assistance is necessary.
- **Help with the AVC room vigil:** Please participate! For one full year community members have held a 24/7 vigil in the AVC room in Town Hall. **More people are needed** to ensure the round-the-clock presence. Please contact avcouncil@auroville.services, WhatsApp 94430 03617 to sign up. See [here](#) for more information.
- **Join the Wednesdays for Auroville meetings:** There is a weekly community meeting held at the Tibetan Pavilion, every Wednesday 5:00-6:30 pm.

Hot Topics

Farm maintenances cut

The AVFO 'FAMC' cut all maintenances to the Farms via [an email](#) sent to their own newly appointed 'Farm Service', without reaching out to farmers themselves.

According to a [massbulletin](#) released on 4th July by the RA BCC, "all Maintenances previously allocated – whether half or full – have been reduced to a care package, which is the equivalent of a quarter Maintenance". This now effectively turns all farms into commercial units instead of services as farmers will have to generate their own income. This goes against the recommendations made by the Aurovilians involved in the [community budgeting process](#) organised by the BCC in early 2022. The RA BCC highlighted that "Farms/Food and Social Support (Maintenances) were amongst the highest budgetary priority areas, to receive more financial support from the City Services budget if needed/possible."

In the same massbulletin, the RA BCC noted that "So far, a total of 121 adult Aurovilians have seen their Maintenance support cut by the FO FAMC and BCC, amounting to 13.6% of the Aurovilians supported by a City Services Maintenance". They added: "This is the first occasion at which Childrens' Maintenances have been cut as well – despite the fact that the RA FAMC and RA BCC had amended the Childrens' Maintenance guidelines in October 2021, making all children eligible for this support regardless of the Maintenance status of their parents."

The Farm Group has sent a response to the situation, in which they note the fallacies in thinking that the current way forward of the AVFO 'FAMC' and Farm Service will lead to more food security in Auroville, and that "anyone with a little sense of reality will realize that all these measures are surely not going to help to increase food for Aurovilians." You can find [their full letter here](#).

Forest budget and maintenances cut

The Forest Group updated the community on the recent budget cuts via [an announcement](#) on Monday 3rd July. It has since been confirmed that Chandresh and Torkil of the AVFO 'FAMC' have cut the maintenances and salaries of forest workers of the entire Forest Group, impacting 44 people on maintenance and about 60 workers. More than a hundred people are now without an income with only a week's notice.

The Forest Group met with the Secretary and several members of the AVFO 'FAMC' on Friday 7th July, however the AVFO groups are unwilling to restart the maintenances and budget. It is unclear now what will be done about the gratuity (a form of severance) that the workers have a legal right to.

The Forest Group shared a [report](#) of its work and income and expenditures for the last decades. The report shows that the city budget only partly accounts for forest expenditures, as many foresters have been covering costs out of pocket or through the sale of forest products, such as timber. The report also details the impact of Auroville's forests, and the daily work done for its protection and upkeep.

The Forest Group is reaching out to the wider community to ask for financial support for some of its members and workers as they go through this transitional phase. If you are able to help out, please get in touch at evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com

More Aurovilians in visa trouble

An increasing number of Aurovilians are receiving recommendation letters from the AVFO that state that they are obstructing development or engaged in anti-government activities. Ongoing cases have been referred to Delhi. More information on this issue will be shared in the next bulletin.

If you have visa issues or know someone who does, please reach out to us at evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com and to the RA WCom at workingcom@auroville.services, so that a record can be kept of all ongoing cases.

Update on Satprem's visa situation

On 26th May, Satprem left for Delhi to appeal to higher authorities. He is currently still waiting for a response. The [collective letter](#) in support of Satprem was signed by over 2700 individuals, including about 900 Aurovilians. Additionally, around 150 individual messages and appeals from around India and the world were sent to various ministries and are still coming in.

Legal update

Abri/Ami/Evergreen PKS Land Grab: The court has ruled in favour of the AV Foundation on two issues related to the PKS case. The main case remains ongoing.

Contempt notice re: NGT violations: Notice was issued for carrying on work outside areas of the Crown inspected by the Joint Committee without prior environmental clearance in violation of the NGT order. You can [read the full notice here](#).

Legal notice re: Kalabhumi borewell: The Kalabhumi borewell, which is partially located on the Crown, is in danger of being closed for the Crown Road implementation. The borewell is an important source of water for the Cultural Zone and the alternative plans proposed by the 'ATDC' will force the residents onto the centralised water system of the Auroville Water Service, which is now also in the hands of an AVFO 'ATDC' member, Toby. The AVFO has been sent a notice that unless work is stopped, the matter 'shall be dealt with in accordance with due process of the law.' You can [read the full notice here](#).

National Green Tribunal - Appeal by AVFO: The appeal to the outcome of the NGT case was listed but has been postponed until 4th August 2023.

Quo Warranto: The request for the AVFO 'WCom' to show by what warrant their office is held, claimed, or exercised was heard. The AVFO has filed a counter. The matter has been adjourned and will be heard on 18th July 2023.

Feedback needed on new RAD proposals

On Friday 7th July 2023, over 125 residents attended a Residents' Assembly Meeting held as part of a RAD (Residents' Assembly Decision-making) process. The meeting was initially planned at Unity Pavilion as has been the custom, however it finally took place at Kalabhumi due to the Unity Pavilion team's last-minute cancellation. Meeting notes are available [here](#), and a video-recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

Two RAD proposals, which had gathered the required 60 signatures, were discussed. The first proposal seeks to provide the RA with "the right to call an Emergency RAD with 300 signatures". The second proposal seeks to grant "emergency powers for 6 months to the RA Working Committee (Aravind, Bharathy, Chali, Hemant, Maël, Sauro, Valli)", providing them with the right "to appoint, replace, or add members or constitute groups as needed". You can read the full proposals [here](#).

Feedback is now being sought from all residents on these two proposals. **Please read the [full proposals](#) and send your feedback using [this form](#), before the 17th July 2023.**

Guest Houses ordered to stop taking reservations

In [an email](#) sent on 8th July 2023, two of the team members newly appointed by the AVFO to manage Auroville's guest houses demanded that managers hand over their reservations list and immediately cease to take bookings. The reason given was for the "restructuring" of the hospitality sector in Auroville which would see guest houses split into two categories - "high quality" accommodation which would be restructured into a centrally managed "Auroville Hotel Chain", and "budget accommodation" which would be used to house volunteers and long term guests.

As many guest houses rely on last minute reservations, particularly in the summer, preventing them from taking bookings could create immediate financial problems. There hasn't been any indication on whether financial support will be given to those Aurovilians who may lose their source of income.

Other updates and Information

Kalabhumi well issue

On 5th May 2023, the residents of Kalabhumi community received an [email from Lieve Claes](#) on behalf of the AVFO 'ATDC' stating that the borewell in front of the community supplying water to Kalabhumi, Existence, CRIPA, Music Studio, Aurofilm, and Dehashakti will be closed for the Crown construction. They were told that well users will be shifted to a centralised water distribution system under Auroville Water Service (AWS). On 13th May, [the well users responded](#) with the request for plans for the Crown, trajectory, alignment, width, work timelines, Right of Way, etc. noting that the well is located between private lands on both sides, and seeking information about expert supervision, as vague markings indicate concrete stormwater channels atop the well, which raises serious concerns about aquifer contamination. They also sought to understand the costs the residents were being asked to incur due to the disruption, as previously, the well users had paid for maintenance of the water system and had access to free water.

Meanwhile, meetings were held with AWS to understand the best way forward. [The AVFO 'ATDC' responded on 6th June](#) stating: "The detailed plans for the Crown are not meant for scrutiny by the residents of Auroville" and "it is important the residents understand that they are not dealing here with multiple choices". As for costs, it was stated that they would seek financial support from GoI for the main water lines, but the cost of installations etc. shall be borne by the residents. This is estimated at Rs.30,000 per household, excluding monthly costs.

On 13th June, a [legal notice](#) was served to the AVFO and its 'ATDC' to halt development in the area, citing multiple issues with the development. On 15th and 16th June, AWS began to dig in front of Kalabhumi gate, and the CPWD arrived with a JCB to clear space for the channels. The residents showed the senior engineer and the site manager the legal notice. The site manager then left. Another email from Kalabhumi residents [was sent to AVFO 'ATDC'](#) on 15th June regarding the legal notice.

The CPWD again returned onsite to dig on 21st June, and the LT electricity cables going towards Existence were destroyed before the residents could halt the work. The CPWD returned on 23rd June, but as a Kalabhumi resident had dug out the earth partially covering the pipeline on the community side to show them the angle and location of the pipe, they left. Since mid June, neither the AWS nor the CPWD has returned.

AV Council room vigil - one year of presence

Last July 2022, with no prior warning, the AV Council received an email from the AVFO 'ACUR management team' ordering them to vacate their room in Town Hall by 12 noon the following day. Over the past year, a small group of committed residents have maintained a 24/7 presence in the room, thereby ensuring that the RA working groups have a dedicated meeting space in Town Hall. Most recently, when the Residents' Assembly Service discovered that they had been suddenly locked out of their office, they were able to continue to offer their weekly open house in Town Hall because the room was still available.

1st July 2023 marked one year of continuous presence. During that time, there has been an instance of [physical violence toward the AVC secretary](#), as well as inconveniences such as the power being cut and having access to water and the bathroom withheld.

More help is needed to continue this important vigil. If you are able to offer one or two hours a week please contact avcouncil@auroville.services or WhatsApp 94430 03617 to sign up. See [here](#) for more information.

Secretary community meetings

In April, May and early June 2023, the Secretary's office sent [email invitations](#) to Auroville communities inviting residents to meet with the Secretary and members of her 'working groups'. The invitation stated: "The purpose of these visits is nothing in particular except her endeavour to communicate with the residents more personally and also to create an opportunity to ask questions or express some ideas and/or concerns".

The meetings were held in various locations across Auroville. While residents present varied at each meeting, generally, the numbers were low. The AVFO media team shared regular updates on social media about the meetings, which led some community members to express that these meetings may be a PR exercise that may be used to justify a later violation, as was experienced after the round of community meetings that took place prior to the destruction of the Youth Centre.

The format of the meetings tended to be the same, in some cases presentations were given by the AVFO 'working groups'. In almost all, the Secretary asked attendees to introduce themselves and talk about why they were in Auroville and what was their "contribution".

For at least two of the meetings, the Secretary invited visitors such as the Inspector General of Puducherry Prisons Sri Ravideep Singh Chahar and Sunil Varghese, who has recently been 'appointed' by the AVFO as an external 'hospitality resource person'.

Information is being collected about the community meetings so if you have anything to share about a meeting that you attended, or have reliable knowledge of what took place, please email evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com.

Report on Murthy's situation post land exchange

As reported in Bulletin #60, Murthy, an award-winning stone sculptor, had been working on Auroville land near the tollgate since 2008. In November 2022, he was asked by AVFO 'Landboard' members to vacate the land as they were planning to exchange it with lands inside the Master Plan area. At the time, several promises were made to him, including that he would be given another piece of suitable land and that he would be compensated for the infrastructure costs, which he had invested his personal funds into. On that basis, Murthy shifted to Aurobrindivan in December 2022. However, the Landboard has failed to follow up with Murthy in any way and in March 2023 he was informed that the AVFO will not be providing him with any of the promised compensation. It has also transpired that the 'Landboard' had already exchanged the land in October 2022, prior to any discussion with Murthy about shifting his place of work.

As he has not been able to work since his forced relocation, Murthy has had no income and has been relying on his non-Aurovilian family to survive. Please see [here](#) for a full report by Satprem on Murthy's situation.

RA TDC update

The RA TDC shared an [open letter](#) written to Friend of Auroville [Michael Bonke](#), regarding the clearing work that has recently been taking place on his land which lies within the Auroville Masterplan area. The letter draws his attention to the fact that in accordance with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) verdict, except on limited portions of the Crown Road no work should be carried out until proper township plans have been prepared. The RA TDC [massbulletin](#) states that "We feel it is our duty to inform him that we have noted and documented the violations that have been executed in the Auroville project area, aka the Master plan area, on his instructions". On 12th June 2023 a [contempt of court](#) notice was filed against the Secretary, members of the AVFO 'ATDC' and 'Landboard', and members of the CPWD in relation to the numerous violations against the NGT verdict.

In recent months the RA TDC has written a number of letters and reports in relation to violations of the NGT judgement by different parties, which can all be found [here](#).

In a [letter to the community](#) they shared that "The letters and reports are mostly addressed to the Joint Committee, the CPWD and the Auroville Foundation Office, ... we have also written multiple letters to the various Aurovilians and others (e.g. Michael Bonke) that are going against our agreed-upon community processes and RAD decisions, reminding them about the NGT judgement of April 2022".

Errata and a Clarification

- In a “call for support for forest workers” in Bulletin #64 it was mentioned that support is needed from next year onwards. It ought to have said from next month onwards, i.e. July 2023.
- In [Sehdev Kumar’s letter](#) regarding the expulsion of Satprem he mentions the “June ‘23 Report of Working Committee about Satprem”. For clarity, the report he refers to was written by the AVFO ‘WCom’ and not the RA WCom.

Media & Other Links

- 4th July 2023, LesFrancais.press: “[Auroville privée de son créateur français](#)” (in French)
- 30th June 2023, Radio France International: “[Expulsion de l’un des architectes français de la cité utopique d’Auroville](#)” (in French)
- 29th June 2023, The Hindu: “[French National and long-time Auroville resident served notice to leave country by July 1](#)”
- 28th June 2023, The Times of India: “[Centre asks French Auroville resident to leave India by July 1](#)”

Writings by Aurovilians

- **Healing the Desecration of Mothers Dream:** An [open letter](#) by Sâvitra addressed to the AVFO ‘WCom’
- **The Touch Stone:** An [Auronet post](#) by Jean-Yves Lung regarding the withdrawal of Satprem’s visa recommendation.

About us

We are a group of Aurovilians who are actively involved in understanding the current crisis situation in Auroville in order to find a way forward together.

We stand for:

- Respecting our community processes for decision-making
- A collaborative approach in developing Auroville using integrated methods such as the Dreamweaving initiative
- Transparency and fairness in the organisation of Auroville
- Creating unity with our diverse voices

Please note that the website <https://standforaurovilleunity.com/> contains a great deal of information and a detailed timeline.

With regard to future actions, those who have particular skills such as writing, social media, film editing etc - you are welcome to write to evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com.

We hope this has been helpful. Let's keep working to find a way to bring us closer together to the beautiful dream of human unity in Auroville. We can do it... together.

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