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Auroville Bulletin 69

MM lake excavation continues, Legal update, Visitor's Center vacate Info Service

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

Tuesday, 5th September 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

- **Assist with the documentation of tree-cutting:** Instances of tree-cutting are happening every week across Auroville. It is important to document where and when this is happening; If you are available and willing to help with documentation, please get in touch with evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com.
- **Support for Maintenances:** An increasing number of Aurovilians have been cut off from their Maintenance, and are in need of support. For more information, please contact the BCC: bccoffice@auroville.services. If you wish to support the Farm or Forest Group as a whole, please contact us at evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com and we will redirect you as needed.
- **Financial support for legal fees:** If you can donate towards legal and delegation fees, please email evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com. Please see [here](#) for more information about why further financial assistance is necessary.
- **Help with the AVC room vigil :** Please participate! For nearly 8 months the community has 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

Matrimandir lake excavation continues



The second segment of the Matrimandir (MM) Lake continues to be excavated, uprooting all but one of the mature Neem trees in the area. The second segment is around 2.5 times the size of the test segment. Large quantities of earth have been removed to lower the ground level by 4-5 meters. According to an [RA TDC report](#), around 125 trees are threatened by the work which is a violation of the [NGT judgement](#) stating that no further construction is to be started in any area of Auroville. Earlier this month, Narad - who was given the task of building the MM gardens by the Mother - [resigned from his work](#) in protest against the current actions of the MM executive team.

Apart from the damage to the flora and fauna of the MM gardens, questions regarding hastily pushing ahead with the next section of the lake have been raised by Jan Imhoff, the engineer in charge of the design and testing of the MM lake. In May 2023, Jan wrote an [open letter](#) to the MM executives questioning their decision to start the excavation of the second section before the test section had been finished and evaluated. He wrote that “There is no merit in barging ahead with the next sections of the lake in order to finish the project quickly. We have to adhere to the plan as agreed upon 3 years ago and complete the first section, thoroughly test it and show that it performs well... Failing to do so will create a gigantic maintenance nightmare and lead to a monumental waste of resources.” In a “[Note on Planning](#)” released earlier this month, Jan argued that a project on the scale of the MM lake ought to have Planning Approval due to “[the] significant impact on a large number of people, on the environment and on the surroundings, Auroville as well as the villages in the vicinity”. It is currently unclear how the lake can be constantly filled and maintained with the necessary quantities of water, without having a detrimental effect on the local water table.

Legal update

Office Order petition - Madras High Court - The case challenging the Office Order assigning new executives to various services, such as Visitor's Centre and the Security Team, was dismissed on 11th August. In the meantime, the official court order has been published, which you can [find here](#). The RA WCom has shared their views on the case in [a massbulletin](#), in which they state that "As this judgement is not in our favour, we are consulting with our lawyers to explore all options and decide on the next course of action. We are still hopeful that we can address this situation through legal means. We would also like to remind everyone that the legal route is made of ups and downs, and we assure you all that we fully trust the work of our lawyers as we go forward."

AVFO appeal against 12th August 2022 judgment in favour of the Residents' Assembly - Madras High Court - On 12th August last year, the case regarding the legitimacy of the RA working groups was judged in favour of the RA. Soon after, on 26th August, the AVFO appealed the case, and obtained a temporary stay on the judgement pending the outcome of the appeal. The case was heard on 4th September 2023. A massbulletin from the RA WCom informed that "the Hon'ble judges noted that the RA is a statutory body...allowing the RA to function on the condition that no policy decision is taken that would change the structure of the Auroville Foundation. This removes impediments and restrictions on the functioning of the RA and its Working Committee, subject to the above condition." The RA WCom added that they would "comment further once the judgement is published". .

Outer Ring Road case - Madras High Court - A new writ petition by an affected resident asking the court to intervene in the planned 'Outer Ring Road' was not admitted by the Madras High Court, as the said resident had been offered another house. The order confirms the functions of the RA to formulate the Master Plan and do Admissions and Terminations, but also states that "indeed, Auroville houses are the property of the Auroville Foundation, and the Governing Board has the full legal right to do with them as they see fit. Individual Aurovilians, who are the "third party" that the judgement speaks of, have no right to claim any say over Auroville assets: they are allowed to use it or not, as the Governing Board decides." This seems to enter in contradiction with the 12th August 2022 judgment on the Working Committee case, which insisted on mutuality between the Governing Board and the Residents' Assembly, insisting that none is more powerful than the other. More clarity is awaited through ongoing court cases.

Visitors Center Information Service team told to remove books

On 19th August 2023, the team working at the Visitors' Center (VC) Information Service was instructed [by email](#) to remove all written material by 1st September 2023. The mail, sent by the AVFO-appointed 'VC executives', stated that the intention was to "move and merge the book selling activity into the space that is presently taken up by the AV Papers book shop; [and] to end the activities of the information giving activity in the VC campus, as this will be taken up by the VC executives". In the following days, all books and relevant documentation were moved out of the space. It is unclear what information the AVFO team will present to visitors, however the Info Service team have been told that they may continue to communicate information to visitors verbally.

New Crown Road 'holes' pose health hazards

Mosquito larvae have been observed in many of the anchor holes in the paving slabs laid along the Crown Road. There are hundreds of these holes, originally used to lift the slabs into place with a crane. So far the holes have not been filled in by the road contractors and have been left to fill with water after the recent rains. As mosquitos breed in stagnant water, the holes have become a breeding ground, raising concerns of a potential increase in mosquito-borne diseases in and around Auroville.

It is possible that mosquitos are also breeding unobserved in the new Crown Road stormwater channels, which was a concern raised by Satprem in his [report](#) dated 28th February 2023. At that time, Satprem advocated covering the stormwater channels with cast iron grills, stating that "the proposed system is not at all suitable for [the] Auroville context".

In addition, several reports of injuries due to people inadvertently stepping in these holes have also been reported. A concern was also raised regarding cows possibly breaking a leg by stepping in a hole since they are not easily visible at night or when filled with water and leaves.



Other Updates and Information

Self-education program

The Dreamweavers, in their presentation to the community, have initiated a Self-Education Programme and [invite the community to join](#). You can see what the programme is about in the video below, and ask for more details or sign up by sending an email to selfeducationauroville@gmail.com.



Forest Group fact check of GB ‘FAMC’ report on forests

The Forest Group has [circulated](#) a rebuttal to the recent report of the GB 'FAMC' on forest work in Auroville. The document includes the original report and can [be found here](#). Some points include:

- Despite the claims of the AVFO 'FAMC' that "Many of the land parcels in the City area (300+ acres) have been purposefully planted with trees on the infrastructure Right of Ways (RoW) and other City Center areas", the forest was not planted there purposefully, most forest was planted before any gazetted Master Plan existed, and certainly the planting did not occur to impede development, as the report implies. Many foresters have been working in collaboration with Town Hall for development of the City, citing successful instances, such as the Gaia area.
- The AVFO 'FAMC' report also claims that "Many land contours have been changed by digging out large water catchment areas without city detailed planning or approval from the Auroville Town Development Council and solely with the intention to block any city development and maintain hold over the lands enjoyed by the stewards' family and friends." The Forest Group notes that these accusations deny the history of Auroville, in which reforestation and the creation of water catchment areas was a collective work and that the foresters' vital work protected the land from encroachers.
- Other claims of bad financial management and foresters enriching themselves by sale of timber are addressed, as well as the accusation that foresters have not made the effort to set up a sawmill, despite the fact that this has been tried but license has not been given by the government. The foresters note that "Again, it is surprising that your institutional memory is lacking as, in 2012, Chandresh helped draft a letter for the Working Committee to request the AVF to apply for a license and subsequently 5 months later Torkil himself milled up 3000 CFT of Auroville timber in various surrounding sawmills." Both names mentioned are members of the current AVFO 'FAMC'.

You can read [the full document here](#).

RA TDC - 'If we want to truly be the City the Earth Needs'

The RA TDC wrote to the Secretary and the AVFO 'Land Board', sharing a [report](#) regarding the recent tree-cutting in Revelation Forest Sanctuary. Several of Tamil Nadu's ministers in the Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change were copied into the letter. In June 2023, for 2 days, workers employed by the AVFO 'Land Board', cut a total of 1,863 trees aged between 3-15 years old. Most of the trees were rare evergreen species which are slow growing and can take around 200 years to mature. The report states "this has a huge impact, which unfortunately cannot easily be quantified, to biodiversity loss and a young, yet functional, ecosystem".

In the accompanying [letter](#), the RA TDC urged the Secretary and the AVFO 'Land Board' to consider the environmental impact of the current rushed implementation of the Master Plan, not just to Auroville itself but also in the wider context of the earth's climate crisis. They wrote "In this age when the planet is on the verge of going into an unprecedented climate crisis, all planning must be based on the highest levels of environmental sustainability and climate resilience if we - Auroville - truly want to be the City the Earth Needs".

Srinivasamurty's 'note of gratitude'

On 31st July 2023, former Undersecretary of the Auroville Foundation Srinivasamurty, shared a [note of gratitude](#) on the occasion of his last day of service at the AVFO. The note was published in the RA News & Notes on 4th August 2023, and by the [AVFO's 'WCom'](#) on Auronet on 1st September 2023. The note has not yet been published in the AVFO News & Notes. Srinivasamurty served as Undersecretary for nearly 30 years and covered the Secretary role on a number of occasions when the Secretary post was unfilled.

At the start of the AVFO takeover of Auroville, Srinivasamurty signed a number of [emails](#) and [filed FIRs](#) (criminal charges) against 6 Aurovilians on behalf of the Secretary.

In April 2023, he was suspended from his role and replaced by B.S Sathyanarayan. It is unclear what the charges against him were, however in a [blog](#) published on Auronet, an Aurovilian well acquainted with Srinivasamurty claimed that the charges against him were "vindictive" and that he had sought legal advice.

Srinivasamurty's note read "Auroville has made me what I am today, hoping more of inner progress and though the outer development may appear to be more of ignorance, pride or ego, still. But it has been the most valuable phase of my life, having started my career here in Auroville! ... But for the unfortunate event in the last part of my service, which taught me hard lessons, I joyfully learnt so much & felt humbled to come across so many sincere aspirants, great scholars and even so called politicians to be deeply spiritual and evolved in their personal lives..."

Media & Other Links

- **AV News Podcast 2:** The second edition of the AV News Podcast is available on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [YouTube](#) and on [this page](#) of the Auroville Media website. A [Tamil version](#) is also available.
- **Auroville Today with Deepika:** [Prosperity and decline since antiquity](#) (Issue 403, August 2023)
- **The Hindu:** [Have you been to Chennai's Tholkappia Poonga? Meet the ecologist behind it](#) (August 23)
- **New Indian Express:** [Felling of trees to attract jail term, fine as Tamil Nadu plans Tree Act](#) (August 23)
- **Youth Link:** [Auroville International Youth Day 2023](#) (video on Youtube)

Changing the narrative

In June 2023, the RA WCom shared [via massbulletin](#) their [response](#) to the AVFO 'WCom' [Annual Report](#) August 2021 - August 2022. The report contained a number of often-repeated narratives that continue to be spread by the supporters of the AVFO to justify the ongoing takeover of Auroville's assets. As the RA WCom notes "With the benefit of nearly 12 months of hindsight since the end date of this report, it is clear that many of these erroneous statements do not reflect the reality of the situation, however, we still continue to hear many of these narratives being repeated." The response addressed numerous errors in the AVFO 'WCom' annual report, the most common of which will be shared in upcoming editions of the Bulletin.

The original statements from the AVFO 'WCom' are presented in italics, followed by the RA WCom responses.

"Auroville development is too slow"

"The Galaxy Plan became, years later, the main denominator for the Master Plan. But from the very first beginning it was clear what was asked from the Aurovilians: Constructing the Matrimandir, the Matrimandir gardens, the Matrimandir Lake, the Crown and the four Zones (residential, international, industrial, and cultural). In 2008 the Matrimandir was completed (40 years (!) after the inauguration of Auroville). All the other key-elements had hardly started, in any case they were not completed. To give a dire figure of the total built-up area of what Auroville should have manifested: only 3.2% had been realized."

The Matrimandir was indeed finished in 2008 after the inner chamber for concentration was completed and accessible since 1993. There are many reasons for the time it took to complete, particularly the technical challenges that the structure of the Matrimandir presented. Several generations of Aurovilians participated in constructing 'the Soul of the City', and consciousness in building it was often seen as more important than the time frame for completion. In Auroville especially, what is truly important is the evolution of consciousness, which is intrinsically linked to how we do things, the process - rather than the speed. Many temples and holy places have been built over generations - this doesn't diminish their importance or value for the community but rather expresses the reverence and consciousness with which these tasks were undertaken.

The recent emphasis on rushed 'development' over the past 18 months has only created more disharmony, destroyed well functioning infrastructure and resulted in works of substandard quality. Auroville's success and value requires a skilled and conscious approach that is incongruous with rushed attempts to impose concrete-based roads and buildings, especially if it truly wishes to become the "city the earth needs".

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://auroville.media/> contains a great deal of information on the current situation.

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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