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## **Auroville Bulletin 75**

### **Auro Orchard land exchange, Pebble Garden allocation and PKS encroachment continues**

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

Thursday, 23d November 2023

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

## **Urgent actions needed**

- **Give feedback to AVFO 'ATDC' on Pebble Garden:** Bernard and Deepika's eco-restoration is under threat (see below). Please consider sending your feedback to the AVFO 'ATDC'.
- **Assist with documenting tree-cutting:** Tree cutting happens 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 [evolvingalaxy@gmail.com](mailto:evolvingalaxy@gmail.com).
- **MM Neem Tree Vigil:** Residents have taken up a vigil to protect one of the old neem trees in danger of being cut to make way for the Matrimandir Lake. If you are willing to assist them in keeping their watch, please reach out to [evolvingalaxy@gmail.com](mailto:evolvingalaxy@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](mailto:bccoffice@auroville.services). If you wish to support the Farm or Forest Group as a whole, please contact us at [evolvingalaxy@gmail.com](mailto:evolvingalaxy@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 [evolvingalaxy@gmail.com](mailto:evolvingalaxy@gmail.com). Please see [here](#) for more information about why further financial assistance is necessary.
- **Help with the AVC room vigil :** For nearly 1.5 years 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](mailto: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 4:30-6:00 pm.

## Urgent Topics

### AuroOrchard 10 acres exchanged

Around a quarter of AuroOrchard has been exchanged for plots within the City Area. AuroOrchard was the first farmland of Auroville, it was purchased by the Mother who appointed its current steward, Gérard. AuroOrchard is one of the most productive and diverse organic farms of Auroville. Reportedly, about 10 acres of valuable agricultural land including cashew tope and coconut grove has gone to a well-known local landowner. The AuroOrchard team were not forewarned and when asked, the AVFO 'Land Board' said it was "not AuroOrchard land", despite official records clearly showing that it is part of AuroOrchard. It seems that neither the AVFO 'WCom' nor all members of the AVFO 'Land Board' were informed of the exchange beforehand.

Allegedly, the 10 acres of AuroOrchard have been exchanged for a total of 14 acres, a portion of which is in the City area and the rest near the outer ring road. However, the AuroOrchard land is estimated at much higher value, because of its location near the highway. This exchange alone is estimated to have caused dozens of crores (millions of US dollars) loss to Auroville. Additionally, the private party involved in the AuroOrchard exchange still owns other portions of land in the Auroville city center area.

Similar exchanges are planned for a piece of Djaima roadside land, with reports that the other areas up for exchange are AuroBrindavan, Pebble Garden, Forecomers/Ravena, and Hermitage. While land exchange can be an effective way to consolidate the missing plots in the City Area, proper evaluations and information are missing. Many residents feel that land bought by Mother should be treated with care as she poured her energy into these lands. Additionally, the AVFO is giving landowners a lot of leverage to choose highly valuable plots and exchange them at sometimes great financial loss to Auroville, such as the AuroOrchard land in question, the previously exchanged Murthi' plot on the Tindivanam road, and the Djaima area. In contrast, the AVFO has done very little to retrieve the many acres of encroached lands, and has not acted on the purchase of new land plots which were negotiated at much cheaper rate by the Land Board in 2022.

## **Pebble Garden land allocated by AVFO 'ATDC'**

[Pebble Garden](#), the eco-restoration project of Bernard and Deepika, is under threat by the AVFO 'ATDC'. A plot has been given to Auroyali Construction for 'temporary' use as a stockyard for building material. Pebble Garden is nationally known as a highly successful project, which has transformed a stony, 'pebbled' land into a lush ecosystem over the last 29 years. The plot in question has been fenced, planted, and cared for since 2001 and includes a water harvesting pond and rare local species of trees. The AVFO 'ATDC' proposes that Auroyali shares the access with Pebble Garden, meaning that truckloads of building material will regularly come through Pebble Garden, impacting the entire project. According to Bernard and Deepika, this new development if left unchecked "will destroy the entire place, ruin the very existence and purpose of Pebble Garden and our commitment here". You can find a letter on this topic from Bernard and Deepika [here](#).

**Bernard and Deepika appeal to all Aurovilians to please send their feedback to the AVFO 'ATDC' (at [application-avenir@auroville.org.in](mailto:application-avenir@auroville.org.in)) and to forward a copy to [pebblegardenforest@gmail.com](mailto:pebblegardenforest@gmail.com).**

## **Buddha Garden/Shambhala to make way for VIP road without alternative offered**

In July 2023, the Dog Shelter team was sent an [email](#) from the “AVF Special Officer” asking them to “remove and shift the [dog shelter] structures immediately” so that a VIP road could be constructed in time for the visit of the President of India. After several national animal charities contacted the AVFO to register their alarm at the plans, the Secretary [agreed](#) that the Dog Shelter could be given time to make plans to shift their buildings.

Recently, the Dog Shelter team announced in a [report](#) that architect plans for a new shelter have been submitted to the AVFO and that they “hope that after a successful budget negotiation, we will be able to start the construction of the new Auroville Dog Shelter soon”.

However at the beginning of November 2023, Buddha Garden, Shambala Farm and the Dog Shelter received a [email](#) from the AVFO ‘ATDC’ informing them that the AVFO ‘Land Board’ has begun marking out the “Visitors Access Road” for VIPs and that “the road has been handed over to the State Authorities and the building of the road ... is scheduled to begin in the next days/weeks”. The intention of the marking, they stated, is to see which structures and fences will need to be shifted or removed for which the stewards were warned to “be prepared”.

The email went on to say that the stewards should now “move forward with the relocation of the farms/dog shelter and make the necessary financial and administrative preparations needed for this”. Neither of the farms have been offered alternatives to relocate to and they have been informed that there are no funds available to assist them, therefore it is unclear how the people living in the buildings which are earmarked for destruction can comply with these imminent demands, or how constructing a new shelter will be funded.

## **PKS encroachment continues**

PKS, a local businessman and landowner, who has encroached two pieces of Auroville land (one of the plots initially purchased by Michael Bonke) on the Ami/Abri corner and inside Evergreen, has recently continued his illegal work in the Evergreen Forest to mark the land and erect more fencing. On 21st September he installed two cameras in the area and on 18th October, he marked what he considers to be his land with pillars. Over several nights in the 2nd week of November he had men install another 22 pillars inside Evergreen. After each incident, residents sent letters to the AVFO and its ‘Land Board’ asking for help, the latest of which you can [find here](#). No answer or support has been forthcoming.

## **Clearing in front of Town Hall**

Beginning on 8th November 2023 and continuing for several days, there was a large-scale clearing of many of the trees in front of the Town Hall building.



This clearing is seemingly to allow for further building of the Matrimandir lake. An Aurovilian, using his private JCB, was apparently directing the work which is in direct contravention of the NGT verdict. The Aurovilian was later addressed in [a letter by the RA TDC](#), reminding him of the legalities surrounding the NGT verdict as well as his responsibility towards the Residents' Assembly.

## Other Updates and Information

### Voice of Auroville - Issue 04

The RA WCom recently [announced](#) the release of the fourth issue of the Voice of Auroville bimonthly journal. This new issue covers Auroville's unfolding of events in September and October 2023. Amongst other contents, it also features an article on Auroville's evolving approaches to Integral Education, an interview with Dr Debashish Banerji giving an external perspective on the current crisis, and a counter to two misleading narratives often repeated in recent times. You can read or download the issue [here](#).

## Farm Group report

The Farm Group [shared their October report](#) with the community. Important issues raised in the report include:

- After the budgets of the farms were cut without warning over the summer, farmers have been looking into ways of raising funds to bridge the gap until they can become self-sustaining. AVI centres have been assisting with this and films are being made about the ongoing process.
- Since Foodlink was taken over by the AVFO, the relationship between farmers and Foodlink has deteriorated considerably and “will need a lot of effort if it is to work”.
- Members of the AVFO ‘Working Groups’ visited Annapurna farm, stating that they were looking into exchanging 22 acres of roadside farmland for Poramboke land. As the loss of this land would have a detrimental effect on the farm, an alternative roadside plot of around 5 acres was suggested.
- The Farm Group’s report regarding Gratitude Farm, which is an initiative that was [announced](#) by the AVFO ‘FAMC’ in August 2022, “clearly showed the project fell short of its projected goals”. In the first year, the farm produced 20% of their projected yield and earned 7.5% of their projected income.

## Visit of the French Ambassador

The new French Ambassador to India, H.E. Mr Thierry Mathou, visited Auroville on Saturday 11th of November. The Ambassador [met with the Secretary](#) and accompanied her on a visit to the Matrimandir. He then [met with French residents](#). The meeting with French residents was described by some attendees as informative and fruitful, as the new Ambassador was found to be well-informed of the current situation in Auroville.

## **No new financial support for senior residents**

Senior residents of Auroville are facing issues in getting financial support through the "Silver Fund". The "Silver Fund" is a financial support system for older Aurovilians who have been a part of the community for a long time and are in financial need. The AVFO 'BCC' stated that new applications are currently on hold because the policy of the Silver Fund is under review.

This review has been ongoing for 6 months since June 2023. As a result, many older residents have been left without any income and are now depending on their friends and family.

The AVFO 'BCC' explained that they are reviewing the Silver Fund policy because it was never officially approved. Indeed, a proposal to allow all seniors to qualify for support, regardless of their work history or financial status, was not approved by the FAMC or RA. However, the practice of providing financial support to senior Aurovilians who have contributed to the community and are in need is well established. Over the years, it has received the approval of successive BCCs and FAMCs.

For the purpose of clarity, instances of senior support (which were previously provided under the scheme of 'Personal and Social Support') were recently renamed 'Silver Fund', to distinguish them from other types of support. The confusion occurring now might stem from the assumption by the AVFO 'BCC' and AVFO 'FAMC' that an unapproved Silver Fund policy was being used, which is not the case. However, the precedent of giving support to seniors was previously settled.

There is also a 'Permanent Disability Maintenance' category which seniors are eligible for. Seniors have been encouraged to apply for this maintenance through the AVFO 'BCC', as it is listed in an approved document, but so far such requests have been dismissed.

## **Errata from Bulletin 74**

In the 74th Bulletin it was erroneously mentioned that the Tibetan Pavilion was the first building built by Satprem in Auroville. Although he was the architect for the Tibetan Pavilion, the first buildings he built were for the Auroville Earth Institute.

## Media & Other Links

- **Press Release, 9th November:** [Auroville Representatives Highlight Violations of National Green Tribunal Judgement on Tree Felling](#)
- **Deccan Chronicles, 11th November:** [Violating NGT orders, tree felling on rise in Auroville](#)
- **AV News Podcast #7:** The 7th episode of the AV News Podcast is available on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), [YouTube](#) and on [this page](#) of the Auroville Media website.
- **Voice of Auroville:** Issue 4 of the Voice of Auroville newsletter can be downloaded [here](#)
- **Forecomers Forest #1:** A short [1-minute video of Jaap](#) (Ravena) explaining how the land of Ravena and Forecomers, which is reportedly up for exchange, has been formed to work as a rainwater catchment to restore the aquifers for the entire area.
- **Forecomers Forest #2:** In the same series [a 30-second video of Regina](#) (Newlands) explaining the many functions of the forest in the face of climate change.
- **Launch of a new Auroville Today website:** Auroville Today released a new website, which offers free access to approximately ten years' worth of its articles. While the latest issues will continue to be available exclusively to subscribers, the website will progressively include older content, making Auroville Today's documentation of Auroville's history accessible to everyone. The new website is accessible here: <https://auroville.today/>

## 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

If you wish to know more, the websites <https://auroville.media/> and <https://standforauroville.org/> contain a great deal of information on the current situation.

Please note that our previous bulletins can be found at this link: <https://linktr.ee/evolvinggalaxy>

With regard to future actions, those who have particular skills such as writing, social media, film editing etc are welcome to write to [evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com](mailto:evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com). Also feel free to share with us information, questions or suggestions.

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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