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Auroville Bulletin 81

Bulletin resumes, update on land exchanges, and vote in the emergency RAD

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

Saturday, 6th July 2024

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

Urgent actions needed

- **Participate in the ongoing ERAD:** There is an ongoing Emergency RAD about land exchanges. You can vote until tomorrow Sunday 7th June, either in person at the dedicated locations or online from your personalised link sent by the RAS to your email. More information [here](#) or in the dedicated section below.
- **Join the Community gathering on 6th July:** You are invited to attend the community gathering organised today, Saturday 6th July, 5.30pm at the Certitude Sports Ground.
- **Share information confidentially with the RA WCom via email to workingcom@auroville.services.** The RA WCom is collecting information regarding the various interactions with the AVFO and their appointees. This information is necessary in order to protect the RA and will remain strictly confidential.

Editorial note

After a four-month break, the Bulletin resumes. The 81st issue of the Bulletin is focused on the new Emergency RAD about land exchanges and background information. The forthcoming 82nd issue will cover the highlights of Auroville events since March 2024. Until then, if you would like to read more about the last months' events, you can find two useful sources in the section "For Further Information" below.

What is happening now

Emergency RAD on land exchanges



The latest Emergency Residents' Assembly Decision-making process (ERAD) about land exchanges, initiated by the RA WCom, is ongoing. It will be running **until tomorrow Sunday 7th July**. You can read the resolution in [English](#), [Tamil](#), [French](#), [Italian](#), [Spanish](#), [Korean](#) and [Russian](#).

Since 2022, there have been an unprecedented number of land exchanges by the AVFO with the approval of the GB. Recently, the GB approved a [proposal](#) by the Secretary to exchange all Auroville lands outside of the Master Plan area, amounting to a total of 1054 acres (see [Map](#)).

On 28th June, the RA WCom called an ERAD asking residents to express their views on these exchanges. According to the RA WCom, if this land exchange proposal is carried out to its completion, it will cause irreparable damage to those living and working in those areas. The section "Land exchanges continue" below covers more details.

Vote in person or online to help protect Auroville's land.

To vote online, use your personalized voting link sent by the Residents' Assembly Service (RAS). Many residents have reported they found the email in their spam folder: if you didn't receive the link, **make sure you've checked the spam folder as well**. If you still can't find it, you can visit RAS polling stations or write to raservice@auroville.services.

If you prefer to register your decision in person, please visit the RAS polling stations:

- SATURDAY (July 6th) @ Certitude playground: 6 pm onwards
- SUNDAY (July 7th) @ Solar Kitchen: 11 am - 1 pm

Confidentiality is guaranteed: your name and vote will be kept a secret.

Community Gathering on 6th July

COMMUNITY GATHERING WITH POTLUCK DINNER

Saturday July 6th at 5:30 pm
Certitude Sports Ground

ALL ARE
WARMLY INVITED !!!

Let us unite our voices and act together
to protect the lands of Auroville

Sharing of important information,
concerns and aspirations



Organised by the Working Committee, Auroville Council and Others

Today, **Saturday 6th July at 5.30pm**, the RA WCom, AV Council and others are organizing a community gathering and potluck dinner **at the Certitude Sports Ground**. This event aims to bring the community together in support of the lands of Auroville. Important information, concerns and aspirations will be shared.

Organizers **request** participants to “bring a handful of soil from [their] community and a candle for the light mandala to honour Auroville's land”. The event will feature a kid's corner, different stations for veg, vegan and non-veg food. Participants are asked to bring their own cup, bowl, plate and spoon to avoid throwaway plastics. All are warmly invited!

This gathering follows several smaller meetings, organized over the past weeks by the AV Council in some of Auroville's communities located outside of the Master Plan area including Aspiration, Aurelec, Evergreen, New Creation and more. In addition to the AV Council, members and resource persons from the RA WCom were present to inform residents about the ongoing land exchanges and their possible impact on Auroville residents - starting with those living on outlying Auroville land.

Land exchanges continue

Since the end of 2023, the AVFO has secretly conducted several land exchanges for the stated purpose of “land consolidation”, incurring devastating financial losses for Auroville. This section looks into the matter of recent land exchanges, and controversies around it.

RA WCom report on land exchanges

On 8th May 2024, the RA WCom published a [massbulletin](#) in which they shared several documents: a [report on land exchanges](#), a [list of all exchanges \(updated\)](#) executed till date with their estimated value, and a [map](#) showing the affected areas of Auroville. These documents show that, based on the market value of the lands that have been exchanged, **Auroville has lost an estimated amount of at least 245 crore rupees (30 million US dollars)**.

The [report](#) underlines that in these exchanges, established procedures have not been followed. Main concerns mentioned in the report are “massive undervaluation”, “enormous financial loss” and “lack of transparency”. Among other points, the RA WCom point out that “opaque transactions at a loss dishonor [the] goodwill” of those who have acquired the land of Auroville, and that “the recent dismissal of Aurovilian Land Board members and appointment of outsiders, coupled with a total lack of communication regarding land exchanges, raises concerns about conflict of interest and lack of adhering to proper procedures”. This “raises questions about potential underhanded deals”.

The report also mentions: “It is apparent that two Land Board members who are related have negotiated purchases with their business partners. Property purchase documents show their relatives and in-laws as buyers, who subsequently sell the land to speculators.” Additionally, several land owners with land in the Auroville city area reportedly approached the AVFO ‘Land Board’ but were told they should sell instead to an outside party.

AuroOrchard land exchanges

As covered in previous issues of the Bulletin, the AuroOrchard team discovered in November 2023 that vital parts of their farm had been exchanged. Despite many back-and-forth email communications between the farm and the AVFO, and requests to reconsider this exchange or slightly shift its boundaries, the exchange was acted upon and the new landowner started fencing the area. This was followed by several other land exchanges impacting other key areas of AuroOrchard, summarized in a short [one-page summary](#) published by the AuroOrchard team on 7th April 2024, which states that “all these changes have made the farm extremely vulnerable”. This is concerning for Auroville’s food security, given that AuroOrchard is one of Auroville’s most productive farms (in 2023, it reportedly produced about 14 tons of vegetables, 10 tons of fruits, 5000 litres of milk and 2,60,000 eggs). You can read more about AuroOrchard’s story [here](#).

On 3rd May, an AuroOrchard resident reported that the new landowners were building “a slab fence through the most intensely cultivated vegetable fields and beds”. At the same time, the Ganesh temple that is part of AuroOrchard land and was blessed by the Mother was fenced off.

In June, AuroOrchard residents compiled a [chronology of events](#) covering land exchanges in

in June, AuroOrchard residents compiled a [Chronology of events](#) covering land exchanges in their farm. This detailed chronology, which includes links to supporting documents such as email exchanges, offers a comprehensive overview on the matter. Along with the facts, it also highlights the many unkept promises and misleading claims that were made by the AVFO regarding this and other land exchanges.

Felicity & Djaima land exchanges

In March, 1.93 acres in Djaima and 1.5 acres in Felicity were exchanged by the AVFO for 5.4 acres in the Master Plan area, mostly land in the Greenbelt which does not have direct access. In both cases, access to some residents' homes was compromised. These exchanges undervalued Auroville's road-front properties, incurring financial loss to Auroville, and were done without informing affected residents. Felicity's entry gate land was exchanged, forcing residents to negotiate access with new owners. On 25th June, when Felicity residents sought help for a new gate and entry path, the AVFO 'Land Board' reportedly pressured them to empty their community account to fund it.

Djaima has also been severely impacted by its land exchanges. The exchanges have led to the loss of protective fencing for the community, leading to security concerns. Djaima's water supply and infrastructure have also been compromised by these exchanges. In 2022, the parts of Djaima on which the main water lines for the community are located were exchanged. Since then, and despite the residents of Djaima having to pay 1.5 lakh rupees to the AVFO to build a new water tank, this work has not been completed. It is only thanks to the collaboration of the new landowner that Djaima has been able to sustain its water usage.

Plans for future land exchanges

[Minutes](#) from a GB Land Committee meeting on 20th June 2023, obtained through RTI, reveal: "The Secretary Auroville Foundation has suggested... 1054 acres may be purchased through exchange of Auroville Foundation lands owned outside the Master Plan area". This proposal, accepted by the Land Committee and GB, puts all Auroville outlying land at risk of exchange.

After the 67th Governing Board meeting on 31st May (minutes unpublished), unverified reports circulated claiming approval of 50 new land exchanges. The message that was circulated stated, "Planning and measurement work is underway to exchange the lands of Shakti Community, Sangamam Community, Felicity Community, Aspiration Community and Auromodel Community and the remaining land in AuroOrchard."

In the following days, surveyors were reportedly seen in Sangamam, Shakti, Aspiration and Forecomers communities, suggesting a clear intention to exchange these and possibly other Auroville lands.

IAC expresses concern over land exchanges

On 28th March, the IAC shared [a note](#) with the residents of Auroville, stating that they had "received numerous reports regarding the unequal value of land being exchanged by the

Auroville Foundation, and the losses these exchanges are causing for Auroville”. They added that they had sent a “strong-worded statement” to the GB, stressing “the importance of transparency regarding all land exchanges and [requesting] the Governing Board to put them on hold until the community is reassured that effective steps to ensure transparency and fairness to all stakeholders have been taken.”

On 9th June, [a follow-up note](#) was shared via massbulletin, following an earlier joint meeting between the GB and the IAC. The note said, among other points: “We want to affirm that the IAC understands and supports the need for the consolidation of land in both City and Green Belt areas, so that the city the Mother envisioned can be built... However, we know that a city is more than infrastructure. It is about the people who create, live in and maintain the city, sacrificing so much to actualize the Mother’s vision, which, if successfully achieved, will benefit all of humanity. We are convinced that the city is about the spirit more than the material manifestation.” They added: “We will shortly be recommending ways to move forward in a manner that, in our estimate, would be transparent and unifying.” It is the first time since December 2021 that four members of the IAC have signed statements jointly, which seems to indicate a shift in their collective positioning.

Other responses to these exchanges

In response to these land exchanges, the RA WCom published several massbulletins and communications, which are listed in their latest bimonthly reports (which can be found in the “For Further Information” section below). In their [8th May report](#), the RA WCom shared they have “written numerous times to the GB and IAC” and “have informed various relevant officials and have requested swift intervention from the Ministry”. They also said they had “sent a legal notice to the District Registrar”, “to the Collector and to other appropriate authorities”. Additionally, on 21st March a petition signed by about 150 residents was brought to the Registration Office in Vanur and sent to the Collector, asking to stop land exchange registrations. However, this does not seem to have fully stopped the exchanges as of now. On 1st June, at least six different Tamil news channels took interest in this story - especially the AuroOrchard land exchange - and produced several short video clips (available in the “Media & Other Links” section below).

Despite these controversies around land exchanges, fundraising efforts to acquire Auroville land is still ongoing. Several Auroville artists were approached in June 2024 by the ‘Art for Land’ team to offer some of their art pieces. After some artists raised questions about this, the ‘Art for Land’ team clarified that funds raised through this effort could also be used to pay land exchange fees. This prompted an Auroville artist to send [two strong-worded letters](#), and several artists have withdrawn their support to this year’s ‘Art for Land’ campaign.

Over the second half of June, the AV Council started organizing regular meetings in Auroville communities, to inform residents about these land exchanges. On 27th June, the RA’s Auroville Media Liaison posted a video titled “[Do you agree with Auroville land exchanges?](#)” on its Youtube channel. The next day, the [current ERAD](#) was called by the RA WCom in the hope that a strong collective voice from the RA will help pause the ongoing land exchanges and call the necessary attention of relevant officials to this most critical topic. On 30th June, the AVFO ‘WCom’ - now seemingly reduced to five members - reacted to this RAD with a [massbulletin](#) claiming that the RAD was “dishonest and manipulative”. The next day, the RA WCom replied

with an [open letter](#) in which they affirm that the AVFO 'WCom's "statement contains several misleading claims and misrepresentations". Among other points, the RA WCom re-emphasized that this ERAD "aims to protect Auroville's lands and ensure their use aligns with our community's founding principles". They also highlighted that while land consolidation is an important goal, it "must be done transparently, ethically, and in accordance with established procedures". The ERAD runs until tomorrow Sunday 7th July.

If you have any questions about the ERAD, or about land exchanges, make sure you attend the community gathering today, Saturday 6th July at 5.30pm at the Certitude Sports Ground!

For Further Information

Voice of Auroville 6



ISSUE 06
JUNE 2024

VOICE OF AUROVILLE

News & Highlights from the Auroville Community



This publication is endorsed by the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly of the Auroville Foundation.

AUROVILLE
Media Liaison

On 14th June, the RA WCom announced the release of the [sixth issue](#) of the *Voice of Auroville* quarterly journal. This new issue features a piece on bioregional development, and also covers new developments in the Auroville crisis between February and May 2024.

You can read or download the issue [here](#).

RA WCom bimonthly reports

The RA WCom have resumed their bi-monthly reports. On 25th March, they shared two reports via massbulletin, covering their activities for the [months of September to December 2023](#) and those of [January to February 2024](#).

On 24th May, they shared their latest report for the months of [March to April 2024](#). This document covers topics such as the Auroville Foundation internal functioning, their communications with GB & IAC, legal matters, land related matters, finances and assets as well as the proposal for the Matrimandir Lake.

Media & Other Links

- 11th March, **Deccan Chronicle**: [Auroville's future hangs in balance](#)
- 17th March, **The New Indian Express**: [Order replacing Auroville panel illegal: Madras HC](#) by R. Sivakumar.
- 17th March, **The Times of India**: [Madras HC sets aside standing order for Auroville Council](#)
- 25th April, **Le Monde**: [Auroville, la cité utopique indienne menacée par le désenchantement et le nationalisme hindou](#) (French) by Sophie Landrin. An English translation is available here: [Auroville, the Indian utopian city threatened by disenchantment and Hindu nationalism](#).
- 14th May, **Medium**: [Ushering in the Divine Feminine](#) by Rajesh
- 1st June, several videos (in Tamil) featuring land exchanges, including interviews of an Auroville-born resident and a RA WCom resource person: [2-minute interview video](#), [S MEDIA PONDICHERRY](#), [Sun Star Media Pondicherry](#), [Oscar TV News](#) (from 8'20 onwards), [Rainbow TV Pondicherry](#) (from 15' onwards), [Metro Channel News](#) (from 8'35 onwards), [Sathiyam TV](#)
- 22nd June, **WE Demain**, Issue 46: [Auroville, Un rêve est passé](#) (French) by Michèle Decoust

Other media contents:

- 11th March, **Frontline** (The Hindu): [Ancient magic in Auroville: A tiny forest holds hope for the future](#) by Paul Blanchflower
- 17th April, **The New Yorker**: [The Highest Tree House in the Amazon](#) by Allison Keeley
- Two news channels featuring an Auroville youth cycling from Auroville to Italy with her partner and their dogs: [AhmedabadMirror](#) (1st April) & [Nature Talk Podcasts on Youtube](#) (16th May)
- 26th June, Youtube video (in French): [Comment vivre sans argent et sans inégalités?](#) by Mathilde Odile

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. 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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