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Auroville Bulletin 85

AVFO Allies Question Land Exchanges and Legal Update

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

Wednesday, 13th November 2024

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

How can you help?

Urgent actions

- **Support the RA News and Notes:** The RA News and Notes needs financial support to continue functioning. If you can, please consider making a donation to Financial Service account number #252150. To read all issues and subscribe, [click here](#).
- **Support for Maintenances:** Funds are needed to support individuals cut off from their maintenances. 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 these groups via evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com.

Ongoing actions

- **Assist with documenting tree-cutting and clearing:** In light of the Stay Order placed on the NGT verdict it is particularly important to continue with documentation of tree cutting and land clearing. If you are available and willing to help with documentation, please get in touch with evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com.
- **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:** For over 2 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, WhatsApp 94430 03617 to sign up. See [here](#) for more information.
- **Share information confidentially with the RA WCom via email 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.

What is happening now

Land exchanges questioned by AVFO allies

The recent exchanges of Auroville lands are now also being questioned by Aurovilians who have been previously supportive of the AVFO. Since 2022, several parcels of high value lands, many of which are located next to local highways, have been exchanged for land of a much lower value. The RA WCom have repeatedly raised the issue as an urgent topic of concern, as have the IAC. Please see below for a recent letter sent from the IAC to the GB. [One estimate](#) has calculated that the cumulative financial loss to Auroville of the land exchanges is approximately 250 crore rupees (almost 30 million US dollars).

At the end of October 2024, the AVFO Land Officer, Mrs Meenakshi, sent an [email](#) to the AVFO 'FAMC', requesting that over 9 lakh be released from the '[Acres For Auroville](#)' Foreign Ledger in order to pay for the costs associated with a new land exchange. The proposed exchange came to light when two members of the AVFO 'WCom' posted an '[Update on Land Matters](#)' on Auronet, a recent report they had sent to the GB together with other AVFO-aligned residents. The original post, which was quickly deleted, revealed a significant split within the AVFO 'Working Committee' and the AVFO 'Working Groups'. The AVFO 'FAMC', via an unsigned email, had ordered the Financial Service to release the funds to facilitate the land exchange, however members of the AVFO 'WCom' explicitly stated that they had not been consulted and that they were against the exchange. According to their calculations, the exchange represented a financial loss to Auroville of approximately 5 crores, as the seller would receive high value Auroville land located on the Tindivanam Highway in exchange for 3 small pieces of "not important" greenbelt land. They also pointed out that the GB had only given permission for outlying lands to be exchanged for Master Plan lands in the city area.

On 5th November, the same AVFO 'WCom' members shared a [second Auronet post](#) containing a detailed breakdown of land exchanges since 2022. They also reshared the report to the GB that was previously deleted. According to their calculations, the financial loss to Auroville due to the recent exchanges of AuroOrchard, Djaima and Felicity would be around 100 crore rupees. They stated "[these] Land exchanges ... were executed in total contradiction of the Governing Board decision in its 61st meeting ... In the history of Auroville, we have never suffered such a level of mismanagement". They went on: "we came to know in a conversation with Mrs. M. [Meenakshi] that she continues to meet the landowners for future land exchanges. And we also discovered that a land exchange has been approved again by the Governing Board and AVF, without any consultation with the [AVFO] Working Committee".

The AVFO 'WCom' post also revealed that a biometric lock at the Land Board office had been reconfigured so that it could only be opened by a single member of the AVFO 'Land Service', an Aurovillian named Krishnamurthy. When asked, Mrs Meenakshi claimed that the lock was necessary to protect land records relevant for a court case against Dr. Jayanti Ravi. A separate [Auronet post](#) recently made a number of detailed claims of land related corruption, supposedly carried out by an Aurovillian and 'Land Service' member with the initial 'K'.

Legal update

Working Committee Quo Warranto judgement

On 1st August 2024, the Madras High Court pronounced its judgment in the Quo Warranto case filed by the RA WCom against seven residents recognized by the Governing Board as the 'Working Committee'. The [full written judgment](#) was only uploaded on 18th October 2024.

The Quo Warranto case challenged the AVFO 'WCom's authority, namely Anu, Arun, Joseba, Partha, Selvaraj, Srimoyi and Tine, acting as members of the Working Committee. In response, the AVFO filed a perjury case against Hemant Lamba, who was then a member of the RA WCom, accusing him of deliberately giving false evidence or statements under oath by claiming to be a member and to represent the Working Committee. Both cases were dismissed by the judge, Justice Dr. Anita Sumanth.

In dismissing the Quo Warranto petition, the judge noted that the court "cannot, and is not inclined to go into the aspect of whether the respondents [the AVFO 'WCom'], or for that matter, the members of the petitioner Committee [the RA WCom], have earned any disqualification." The judgment also referenced the earlier Division Bench order of 4th September 2023, stating that the Madras High Court's earlier directions would continue to govern Auroville's functioning until new Regulations for the appointment of the Working Committee are finalized.

Different interpretations of the judgment have emerged. On 18th October, the RA WCom published a [first massbulletin](#) stating that "This order does not legitimise the group recognized by the GB as they have not been selected by the RA as per Section 20 of the AVF Act", quoting a recent [legal opinion](#) by their lawyer.

On 22nd October, Sindhuja Jagadeesh who, according to this [letter](#), was appointed "AVF Legal Coordinator" in May 2024, issued [a massbulletin](#) claiming that the judgment confirms the legitimacy of the AVFO 'WCom'. 'AVF Legal' on Auronet also shared an [FAQ document](#) seeking to reinforce this interpretation. An [article](#) posted in The Hindu on 24th October also furthered this narrative.

However, in a [second massbulletin](#) on 25th October, the RA WCom shared a letter to The Hindu in which they clarified that the order "merely states that the members cannot be disqualified through a Quo Warranto petition, indicating that the legal tool used in this case was procedurally unsuitable." They emphasized that the single bench order cannot override previous Division Bench orders, particularly the 23rd February 2024 order stating that "the Working Committee under Section 20 of the AVF Act shall not be interfered with". A single bench refers to a court proceeding presided over by one judge, while a Division Bench consists of two or more judges sitting together - in this case, the Division Bench included the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court.

The RA WCom maintains that since the seven respondents "do not enjoy the confidence of the Residents Assembly, they cannot represent the Residents Assembly of Auroville". The RA WCom are consulting with lawyers about next steps to secure recognition of the legitimate groups selected by the RA.

PKS/Evergreen judgement

The appeal lodged by PKS against the previous judgment on Evergreen land, which had found

the appeal brought by the Auroville premises judgement. Evergreen, which had argued the contested Evergreen land to be rightfully Auroville land, was heard on the 25th October 2024 at the Tindivanam court, and a [new judgement](#) was issued. The Additional District Judge ruled in favour of PKS, meaning that Auroville now faces the potential loss of around one acre of forested land, as well as losing the access to Evergreen community. The area is prime land that lies by the Auroville main road from Kulilapalayam.

The verdict was a surprise because the land had been uncontested since 1992, (when it was purchased) and has been in the peaceful possession of Auroville for over 30 years with Auroville paying the land tax for it during this entire duration.

According to a [massbulletin](#) issued by the RA WCom, certain moves by the AVFO 'Land Service' may have contributed to the verdict. Mrs Meenakshi had included this contested property on a list of land that Auroville needed to acquire, which was shown in court to strengthen the land grabbers ownership claim. Additionally, despite several requests, the AVFO and their 'Land Service' made no effort to take ownership of the land after the previous favorable verdict. In contrast, PKS moved quickly after the judgement and a JCB and a team of workers came to clear the area of trees from 2nd November onwards. RA WCom members and residents attempted to stop the work, requesting that a government survey be carried out beforehand. No members of the AVFO or their 'working groups' came to the site.

The previous Land Board, before the AVFO appointments, confirms that without a doubt, this land had belonged to Auroville for almost 30 years. The AVFO is being urged by community members to urgently lodge an appeal.



TDC judgement, draft regulations appeal

Update from March 2024 (not covered in previous Bulletin issues):

On 15th March 2024, the Madras High Court ruled in favour of the Residents' Assembly in a case related to the constitution of the TDC.

On 19th March, Natasha Storey, the Aurovilian petitioner in this TDC case, wrote a forward-looking letter to the Governing Board. She wrote: "The ruling offers a constructive path forward, allowing us to work together effectively to address the challenges and opportunities facing our community. By embracing the spirit of unity and cooperation, we can ensure that Auroville continues to thrive as a beacon of harmony and progress". As a consequence, the RA TDC and RA WCom drafted new regulations for the TDC, and did a first round of presentation to the community for feedback. However, this was interrupted on 29th March, when the TDC ruling was appealed by the AVFO at the Supreme Court. The ruling is currently stayed until further orders. To know more, read the [6th issue of Voice of Auroville](#) (pages 15 and 16).

Secretary's departure leads to confusion

Three months after being [officially repatriated](#) back to Gujarat in July 2024, the former Secretary Dr Jayanti Ravi continues to be present in Auroville and is still being named as the Secretary in the press. At the end of October, she was seen inside the AVF office and at the Secretaries' home, opposite Bharat Nivas. She also took part in an 'inauguration' of a new New Creation Basketball Stadium as reported in [media reports](#). This raised questions within the community since the new stadium was already inaugurated in 2019 and has been in continuous use since then. It appears that the only recent change was to install a new type of flooring in the stadium.

This is not the first instance of media reports claiming that the former Secretary is still in her post in Auroville. As mentioned in [Bulletin 84](#), a [gossip report](#) in the Times of India shared rumours that she would be taking up "dual responsibilities" as Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and Additional Chief Secretary to the Gujarat Govt Revenue Department. Additionally, a [Hindu article](#) at the beginning of October 2024 continued to name her as the Secretary. The same article also named Vanjulavalli Sridhar as the Deputy Secretary, while her tenure as OSD at the AVFO supposedly ended at the end of August 2024 when she was [reposted](#) to the Andaman Islands.

However, a [report](#) of a meeting with the Chairman of the GB which was circulated by some of the Aurovilians present, stated that the Chairman insisted on several occasions that she was no longer Secretary (please note that these are not officially approved meeting minutes). Additionally, in an [Auronet post](#) from members of the AVFO 'WCom', Dr Ravi was referred to as "the former Secretary".

Latest development works lead to difficult road conditions yet again

The contractors hired by the AVFO and their 'ATDC' began two new major roadworks immediately before the monsoon, leading again to difficult and potentially dangerous conditions for road users, in particular cyclists. Near [Transformation](#), most of the old road has been removed and a shallow trench for Radial 1 was dug out by the CPWD, starting at Lilaloka and ending at Revelation Forest. As always, this work was completed with no prior warning and without any signage, meaning that it is not clear how best to travel in that area and road users have been met with a confusing and dangerous set of circumstances. Some drivers are using the cycle paths instead, causing grave concern as these cycle paths are the route to several schools and used daily by children.

In the residential zone, work began on the well-used and fully-functional [Vikas Radial](#) with the removal of half of the paving stones across the width of part of the road. Access to Humanscapes, Vibrance and Invocation is affected by these actions. Work in both areas was then suddenly stopped without a known reason.

On 10th November, the cycle path between Grace and Arati was expanded to become a 4-wheeler access road to these communities. A belated [announcement](#) about the Vikas Radial roadworks was also shared on Auronet by the AVFO 'ATDC'.

It is unclear where the residents of the communities that are affected by the Vikas radial roadworks are expected to park, as their main entrances and access to secure parking is now blocked.

Other recent development work includes the clearing work for the AVFO staff quarters, a project first mentioned in the [59th GB meeting minutes](#). Three new buildings are planned. These quarters will be located at different points within Auroville: one near the Realization community, another between the Sailam and Vikas communities, and the third next to the Luminosity community. In the interim, non Aurovilian AVFO staff have been given Auroville housing in several communities without consultation with the other residents, even though there are many Aurovilians and newcomers still awaiting housing allocation.

Sri Ma beach returning

After months of erosion, Sri Ma beach sands are returning. From now until March, the sand is now accumulating because the current is coming from North to South. A large number of volunteers worked tirelessly to save the land by filling sandbags which helped to protect the coastline.



Other Updates and Information

IAC letter to GB

Via a RA WCom massbulletin, the IAC shared their [latest letter](#) to the GB regarding land exchanges with the community. The IAC members requested that their letter is not shared to the press or on any social media platforms.

The members note that at their last meeting with the GB in May 2024, they “conveyed [their] disappointment in the lack of transparency as regards land exchanges, resulting in a breach of trust between the Governing Board and the Auroville residents” and urged the GB to halt any further land exchanges.

Plans to divert rain water to MM lake

According to the [AVFO 'ATDC' meeting minutes](#) dated 25th July 2024, two rainwater 'collection ponds' have been designed to "collect the water from the stretch of the Crown which will go from Solar Kitchen to Savitri Bhavan" and divert it to the Matrimandir Lake. One of these ponds is already a natural water collection area and the other would be an artificial collection area where the water would be filtered before being pumped into the Lake. There is no mention in the meeting minutes of the potential impact to the local bioregion and the watershed, however as this rainwater usually feeds into the Irumbai pond it would lead to a negative effect for local villages' water collection and could lead to objections to Auroville's water management from local villagers.

Youth Camp Organized by AVFO

The AVFO organized a five-day 'youth camp' in Auroville during August 2024, hosting 100 participants from all over India with support from the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education. Despite the event taking place after she had been repatriated, the program was inaugurated virtually by Dr. Jayanti Ravi from Gujarat. The program included a range of activities such as farming sessions, yoga classes and cycling tours across Auroville. After the Youth Camp was completed, several [YouTube videos](#) were shared by 'Auroville Official' (previously Auroville Media Interface) and it was covered in [The Hindu](#).

Guest speakers at the program included [Sraddhalu Ranade](#), [Sampadananda Mishra](#), and Raghava Krishna (founder of [Brhat](#), who are soon to be holding a [3-day workshop at Bharat Nivas](#)). According to The Hindu's report, these camps are intended to become a regular feature of the AVFOs educational outreach initiatives, with plans already in development for future sessions.

The organization and implementation of the camp took place without any announcements or invitations being shared with the community and very little engagement with Aurovilians within the program. Additionally, the program makes use of Auroville's spaces and resources at a time when the residents have had their access to shared spaces such as the Unity Pavilion and Bharat Nivas limited by the AVFO. The press report also directs aspiring volunteers and interns to reach out to the AVFO directly, circumventing established administrative structures like SAVI.

Miscellaneous News

- **Fire at new Ecoservice landfill:** A resident recorded a [fire in the pit](#) at the new EcoService landfill located at Nine Palms. It is not known how or why the pit was set alight. For several days, residents across Auroville reported a strong smell of burning plastic.
- **WCom rebuttal about Entry Board:** The RA WCom shared a [rebuttal](#) to the AVFO 'WCom' [massbulletin](#) titled "Important Notice: Correct Process for Newcomer Admission to Auroville".
- **RA WCom report for August & September 2024:** The [latest report](#) from the RA WCom has been released.
- **RA TDC report:** The RA TDC shared a [Report on Tree Felling](#). The report catalogues the excessive clearing of trees and understory that has been carried out by the AVFO since the Supreme Court placed a stay on the NGT judgement in December 2023.
- **Forest workers visited AVFO:** In September 2024, a group of [forest workers](#) went to Town Hall to attempt to speak to the AVFO 'BCC' about the gratuity money owed to them. The members of the 'BCC' refused to meet with them, so the forest workers instead delivered a petition to the AVFO.
- **Foresters Silver Fund requests continue to be ignored:** Senior members of the Forest Group are fighting to have their claims to Silver Fund acknowledged by the AVFO 'FAMC' and 'BCC'. Please see [here](#) for the latest emails they have sent.

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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