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Auroville Bulletin 26

AVFO continues take over with more office orders, NGT follow-up, Legal cases update, Community walk

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

5th July 2022

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.

Town Hall Office take over continues with office orders of dubious legality

Since the Office of the Secretary, Auroville Foundation (AVFO), produced an [Office Order](#) on 21st June, removing the long standing Executives of ACUR - Town Hall management (Anne Marie, Donata and Laxmanan) and replacing them with 3 Aurovilians (Balu Kuppusamy, Lieve Claes, Venkateswaran) who align themselves with the AVFO, there has been a forceful effort to take over the entire building and all of the office spaces in order to use it for the sole purpose of the AVFO's 'Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC)'.

Land Board Office Order

On 28th June, an [Office Order](#) was sent to the Land Board by Dr. Seetharaman, the Officer on Special Duty who was recently hired by the Secretariat for the AVFO's 'ATDC'. The Office Order aims at dismissing two active members of the Land Board before the end of their term, without reason or notice: Renu Neogy and Padmanabhan. They are to be replaced by two non-Aurovilian retired District Revenue Officers: C. Meenakshi and T.K. Ponnambalam. The AVFO does not give any reason for replacing the two Aurovilians, and as with the other recent Office Orders, it is issued with the approval of the "Competent Authority". Despite numerous inquiries about who the "Competent Authority" is, no clarification has come from AVFO yet. Like many recent Office Orders, this one also violates the community agreed-upon process around selecting, or dismissing, group members.

This Office Order was followed by an email from Lieve Claes, ordering the Land Board to move their office to the Archives building within two days. The reason given was that the AVFO's 'ATDC' needed more space.

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The Land Board is a working group of the Residents' Assembly (RA). Its selection process involves forming a Selection Committee constituted of 9 individuals from the

selection of Land Board members occurred in May 2021.

AV Council ordered to vacate office space in Town Hall in under 24 hours

On 1st July late evening, the AV Council received an email from those recently appointed by AVFO to manage ACUR, ordering them to vacate their office space in Town Hall by the following day at 12 noon. The AV Council [responded](#) that they do not recognise the legitimacy of the new 'executives', as the ACUR executives are supposed to be appointed by the Service Trust and endorsed by the FAMC of the RA. They further insisted that "the ACUR management team has never been in a position to vacate Auroville Working Groups and collective offices without proper process".

Since the 2nd July a few Aurovilians have been maintaining a 24 hour peaceful presence in the AV Council office. Over the weekend, Lieve Claes threatened to call the police on the small and respectful gathering of 3-4 Aurovilians. The doors to the Town Hall and the toilets were locked and the electricity was cut to the AV Council room in an attempt to discourage people from keeping presence.

On Sunday 3rd July, an [announcement](#) on Auronet from the AVFO appointed 'ACUR management' directed to the AV Council stated that "it is totally up to us to define the management [of Town Hall] ... we have informed you of our decision, and will not engage in any further discussion on this matter." The announcement also included a criticism of the AV Council's stand and views over the past months, referring again to a "vast majority" of residents being supportive of the AVFO's actions. This is not substantiated, since all collective processes and gatherings so far have shown the opposite.

In light of the update from the Madras High Court (please see below), AV Council members have requested that a peaceful presence is maintained in their meeting room until the case is heard on the 11th July. If you are available to help, please pass by the AV Council room and leave your name for the schedule.

Swagatham Guest House taken over and used for meeting with NGT Joint Committee members

On 1st July, an [Office Order](#) was issued by the Undersecretary of the AVFO (Mr. Srinivasamurthy), ordering the removal of Ramesh Rao (alias Bunty) as the manager of

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(Ravindra Solanki, Santosh Jadhav and Meenal Kusale).

The following day on 2nd July, a few Aurovilians became aware that a meeting had secretly been conveyed by the AVFO at Swagatham Guest House with the newly appointed members of the Joint Committee such as the District Collector. The Joint Committee is mandated, as per the ruling of the National Green Tribunal, to study the Crown area and to recommend eventual adjustments to the road project so as to safeguard important trees and water bodies. Its recent appointment was not communicated to the WCom of the RA nor to the TDC of the RA. Residents, including representatives of the RA selected working groups, went to the location and requested to meet with the members of the Joint Committee although they had not been invited. They met with the District Collector, the Villupuram Forest officer and K. Geetanjali, Conservator of Forests, Chennai circle. The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, Jayanti Ravi, and Sinduja and Jaya from AVFO's 'ATDC' were also present. Joel from the AVFO media team and Naran were present but remained outside. In spite of the AVFO's intention to keep the RA selected working groups out of the conversation, those who were present (Allan, Island, Natasha and Tom for the TDC of the RA, as well as Suhasini and Raju) reported a friendly conversation and the TDC of the RA were given until Thursday 7th July to send documentation and make a presentation on the forests and water bodies of the Crown area, including alternative proposals for the road.

Please note: ATDC is the acronym used by the AVFO appointed 'ATDC' whilst the Residents' Assembly selected Auroville Town Planning Council is referred to as TDC of the RA.

Legal update on Court cases

On 4th July, the Madras High Court (Chennai) was due to hear a case requesting that the Auroville Foundation, represented by its Secretary, abstain from interfering with the work of the Residents' Assembly and their lawful representatives, the Working Committee of the RA. Two other cases were also due to be heard: the TDC case and the Outreach Media case. Unfortunately the Additional Solicitor General, appearing for the Foundation, was unwell, he had slipped and fallen and suffered a head injury, and so could not be present. The TDC case is postponed till the 6th July. The Outreach Media case and the Wcom case are both postponed to the 11th July.

The court did not issue any interim orders as all parties needed to be heard. The Court reassured once again that if any illegalities were to be found on the 11th, the court would take due action. The lawyers representing the three cases brought by various residents and the WCom of the Residents' Assembly drew

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negative actions against the WCom even after having promised to take no further action. It was reiterated by the court that no action should be taken against the WCom and the court took note that any such action would be held against the Foundation on the 11th.

Letter to the Chairman of the Governing Board

The WCom of the RA sent [a detailed letter](#) to the Chairman of the Governing Board (GB) listing some of the AVFO's misdeeds, especially with regards to the issuing of improper Office Orders. The letter states that these Office Orders, and the recent takeovers as a result, are an "encroachment on the space provided to the Residents' Assembly by the Auroville Foundation Act and the Rules to manage its internal organization and affairs". It also states that "a general impression has now been given that a systematic attack has been unleashed to disempower the residents and throttle the internal organisation into authoritative submission". As a concluding note, the letter requests the Chairman to "instruct the Office of the Secretary to refrain from issuing further office orders and withdraw the [existing] office orders", emphasizing the fact that this "will go a long way to re-establish the scheme and intention of the Auroville Foundation Act and restore confidence and trust amongst Aurovilians and the interface with the Government that had been built over the years".

Community walk on Saturday 2nd July

On Saturday 2nd July, a [community walk](#) took place, with the aim of bringing together and showing the strength of the Residents' Assembly in light of recent events. The event began with a [speech](#) in both English and Tamil and a brief concentration. The approximately 500-strong group of Aurovilians and Newcomers proceeded to walk from the Solar Kitchen up to the Matrimandir, where they gathered under the Banyan for a meditation. Those in attendance reported that the atmosphere was one of joyful community spirit.

Other Updates and Information

On 1st July, a [massbulletin](#) to the community was sent by the AVFO's 'WCom' with a warning that parties in Auroville are "spoiling our reputation as a community and Auroville as a whole". The massbulletin mentions the use of "inappropriate substances", and vague terms such as "inappropriate behaviour" and the need to follow the "agreed discipline" or the "agreed self-discipline", followed by a threat that any persons involved in such behaviour would have to "face the consequences". These warnings on policing unclear and subjective moral codes fail to explain the criteria for the "agreed discipline" or the nature of the subsequent "consequences".

AVFO's 'FAMC' requests to meet AV services and Units

Several units and services have received emails and a '[Circular](#)' from the AVFO's 'FAMC' members requesting to meet. As with the other 'Working Groups' appointed recently by the AVFO, this group has also not been selected through an official Auroville process and has no authority to dictate actions. If you work for a service or an activity that has received such a request, it is advised to email the WCom of the RA (workingcom@auroville.services) and the FAMC of the RA (famc@auroville.services) for guidance. The proposed meeting place with the AVFO's 'FAMC' was [announced](#) as being their new office at the recently taken over Archives building.

Action needed

- **Peaceful presence needed at Town Hall, AVC meeting room:** As above, please pass by the AV Council meeting room and give your name and availability.
- **Request from AV Council:** AVC posted a [request](#) on Auronet asking residents who have been affected by blocked email or Auronet access to share the details with them by emailing avcouncil@auroville.org.in or avcouncil@auroville.services or by Whatsapp via Sathiya (AVC's secretary) on +91 90472 40618
- **Community Gathering :** The next community gathering, a potluck and social

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support this event in any way please write to
avcommunitygathering@gmail.com.

- **Call for financial support:** If you would like to donate towards legal, delegation and organisation, please email evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com.
- **Change your email address:** If you are still using an @auroville.org.in email address, please note that any email you send or receive can be seen by the unknown persons currently holding the admin keys. This newsletter may also become blocked at some point. Please send us an alternative email address at which to reach you in case this occurs.

Media & Other Links

Reports on the community walk:

- **Tamil news report :** [Daily Hunt](#) local news
- **Hindu article:** [Hard copy image](#) of Hindu article
- **Video:** [YouTube](#) video

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

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- 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. are welcome to write to evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com.

Please also share your thoughts and suggestions by replying to this email.

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.

For those who have had previous technical problems receiving the Bulletin, the list of all previous Bulletin issues is accessible here: <https://linktr.ee/evolvinggalaxy>

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