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Auroville Bulletin 59

Destruction of trees in Auroville

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

Monday, 28th March 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

- **Write a letter about yourself:** All Aurovilians are called on to write a one page letter telling what brought you to Auroville, why, when and what your contribution has been to building the City, please see below for more information.
- **Support Miraculous Productions!:** Miraculous Productions are performing their latest play '[Jane Bonda](#)' at Bharat Nivas on April 26th-29th. Some Miraculous Productions team members are in need of financial support at this present moment in time, if you are able to offer any assistance please donate to FS account **251058**. If you have any questions contact Jesse on **9486623749** or email to indispirit@gmail.com.
- **BCC calls for support for Aurovilians on bridging maintenances:** 25+ Aurovilians working for Auroville have been moved onto bridging maintenances without warning. Please see [here](#) for more information, and email BCC on bccoffice@auroville.services or bccauroville@gmail.com.
- **Financial support for legal fees:** If you can donate towards legal and delegation fees, please email evolvingalaxy@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.

Please note: To stay informed and respond to the on-going tree cutting, please join the SOS Telegram group, link is [here](#).

Hot Topics

Tree cutting at Darkali

The [public tender](#) of the CPWD for 'Cutting Of Trees In Darkali Area' ended on March 2nd. From Thursday 9th of March onwards, the AVFO 'ATDC' sent workers to the area to cut down trees. Residents repeatedly came and stopped the work. Despite the public tender, no one present was able to show work papers from the CPWD. On Saturday 10th of March in the morning, dozens of hired workers came, including women and teenagers instructed to stop those opposing the felling. Some [confrontations](#) occurred when residents tried to stop the work. This time, the workers employed by the AVFO 'ATDC' felled 197 trees, with some knocked over due to cutting of large trees. You can see [a video of events here](#).



The clearing at Darkali was supposed to be strictly guided by the outcome of the National Green Tribunal case, as the judge at the time ordered a Joint Committee to decide on how to implement the Crown Road with minimal environmental damage. The [Joint Committee recommendations](#) listed a number of trees (321) that would have to be cut for a reduced Crown (9.10 meter width). An [RA TDC report](#) indicates that the maximum width cut was 18 meters, while another [report listing all the trees](#) felled, noted that 16 of the trees that were taken down on Saturday were not marked by the Joint Committee for felling.

A report by Satprem, who has worked with volunteers to mark the 9.1 meter width of the road based on the AVFO ATDC road markings. His report counted 50 felled trees outside of the width of the road. [The report](#) outlines his efforts to ensure that the road is properly marked and no more trees outside of the 9.1 meter will be felled. In his [covering email](#) to the relevant people, he notes that “[...] any other tree cut out of the limit of the 9.1 m corridor will be another contempt of court.” Since the cutting on the 9th of March, workers have only been on site to cut the felled trees into smaller pieces.

The Darkali stewards are regularly and wrongly painted as 'encroachers' by some supporting

the AVFO. They have worked together with a former ATDC to keep a path for the Crown clear. In the original proposed Crown way through Darkali only non-endangered and fast-growing trees were planted.. In the more recent proposal for the Crown, the ATDC shifted the Crown by 6 meters into an area where precious and endangered trees were planted. Two members of the current AVFO's 'ATDC' were also in the previous ATDC appointed by the Residents' Assembly. In 2009 they wrote to the Darkali stewards about their commitment to protect the integrity of the forest, as well thanking them for their work in Darkali. The letter to Agnes and Gopal, the stewards, is reproduced below:

Auroville, April 9, 2009

To: **Gopal / Agnes**
Darkali, Auroville

Re: Proposed and agreed future extent of Darkali extent

Dear Gopal,
Dear Agnes,

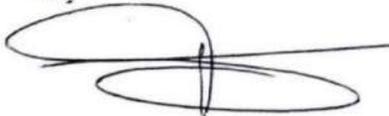
Please see the attached the map showing the proposed Darkali forest extent (in Orange) as agreed upon by you and Roger Anger. The current extent is indicated in green and the green dotted line shows the boundary that is subject to change as per the design as and when this area is detailed out. At that time we will consult and involve you and/or the stewards of Darkali in the design process to ensure that the integrity of the forest is maintained.

On behalf of L'avenir d'Auroville we would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for creating and maintaining such a valuable asset in the city that the future generations will surely enjoy and value.

Let us know if you have any questions/concerns.

Regards,
Coordinators

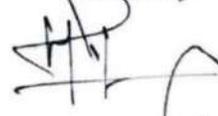
Toby



Lalit



Ponnusamy



Legal Update

On 14th March a 'miscellaneous petition' was heard at the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The court order, posted on the following weekend, notes the concern of the applications that the AVFO "is cutting trees even outside the stretch of crown road work/beyond the recommendation of the Joint Committee." The counsel appearing for the AVFO subsequently states that the AVFO will not go beyond what is recommended in [the Joint Committee report](#), to which the court notes that "the said statement is recorded."

A [massbulletin sent out by the RA WCom](#) list an overview of the order and notes that this "hearing the NGT has clearly reminded the AVFO to respect the original ruling and the existing Joint Committee report, so only the marked and listed trees within the designated 9.1m in Darkali can be cut." The next hearing on this matter is scheduled for the 5th of April.

AVFO attempts to silence RA WCom in the media

A few hours after the initial attempt to start the clearing in Darkali on Thursday 9th March, an article in [The Hindu](#) based on a press note from the AVFO was released, presenting a one-sided version of events. This was followed up the next day by an [article](#) which included some input from a RA WCom press note - the article noted that there were concerns about transparency and due process in relation to the tree-felling. Seemingly in response to this somewhat more balanced article, the AVFO's Officer on Special Duty (OSD) [wrote](#) to a group of newspaper editors, insisting that they should not publish anything from the RA WCom claiming they were not a legitimate group and citing the ongoing update of the RoR. The RA WCom categorically refutes these claims of illegitimacy, as stated in a comprehensive [massbulletin](#) on 13th March in which they shared the email that they wrote to the same editors. However, a further [report](#) that followed the AVFO's line appeared in the New Indian Express on 15th March. An [article](#) from the Times of India dated 19th March stated that "The residents who protested the foundation's move said the foundation has been acting in [an] autocranian manner and [was] attempting to misguide all sections of people".

Several communications from both the AVFO's 'WCom' and the RA WCom were released from the start of the tree-felling on 9th March up until now. You can find these communications [here](#).

Trees felled on private land

More tree felling began on 17th March on the private land owned by Michael Bonke between Youth Centre and the Auro Oceanic resort. Residents were distressed to observe a number of trees being cut, some of which did not appear to be lying in the path of the future road. RA WCom sent a [massbulletin](#) requesting that no-one blocks the work but that documentation should continue. A total of 25 trees, many of them mature, were cut.

There was initial confusion as to why this work was going ahead at this time as the NGT has confirmed that no trees on the Crown outside of Darkali should be cut, but it appears that the NGT ruling only applies to Auroville land. However, the implementation of the Crown on Michael Bonke's land does raise questions as to how Government funds can be spent on a road that runs over private land.



Jay Naidoo meets with the Secretary and selected Aurovilians

Jay Naidoo, former South African Minister in Nelson Mandela's first cabinet, chaired a meeting between the Secretary and selected Aurovilians. Nine of those present were supportive of the AVFO's actions, the other six invited were generally representative of the RA's views. The meeting was held on Monday 27th February. Satprem wrote a report on the meeting, which you can find [here](#). Subsequently, a second report from unnamed people went out via the AVFO's massbulletin.

The meeting covered different topics, such as the withholding of the recent Governing Board meeting minutes, the pressure and insecurity created in Auroville, the need for projects to bring Aurovilians together, and the lack of cooperation between the different groups (RA and AVFO). With regards to Maël's Leave India Notice (who was still present in India at the time of the meeting), repeated requests were made to the Secretary to intervene in his case. Anandi shared that it had been unwise of Maël to voice his opinion and Anu added that the community had failed to prevent him from going in the wrong direction. Generally, none of those supportive of the AVFO showed support nor empathy with Maël's situation. Maël had to leave the country on Wednesday 1st March, and is currently hoping to find a solution for his situation. Maël has published a note, '[Sharing From the Heart](#)' on the situation.

Other updates and Information

General Meeting update

On 16th March there was a General Meeting held at Unity Pavilion. Around 300 residents were in attendance as well as representatives from the RA WCom, TDC & FAMC. The meeting was an open format with opportunity for questions and answers between community members and the working groups. Amongst other important topics, the unfolding situation in Darkali was discussed. The need to keep documenting events was emphasised in order to verify if the AVFO is in contempt of court.

The FAMC made a call for resource persons to assist them as they are having difficulties managing their work with just a 3 person team. Despite the current situation, the FAMC are still assisting the community wherever possible. Please email famc@auroville.services if you can help them in any way. RAS also needs new team members and/or resource persons - please see below for more information.

There was a large show of support for keeping the AV Council room available for the RA working groups, with many more people saying that they would sign up to help. More people said they would volunteer, please contact avcouncil@auroville.services or WhatsApp 94430 03617 to sign up.

Finally, there was a call made by Frederick (Certitude), based on a discussion he had during a recent delegation to Delhi. The request is for all Aurovilians to write a one page letter on what brought you to Auroville, why, when and what your contribution has been to building the City. The letter should be handwritten if possible and also contain a photo of yourself. The intention of this is to be able to share these accounts with relevant persons in Delhi as these people would be more sensitive to personal approaches that are both heartfelt, and give information about the practical and financial contribution Aurovilians have made. If you feel inspired to do this please do it by the first week of April and hand the letter to Fred.

Evergreen - Tract of forest under threat

Jothi Prasad of the AVFO 'ATDC' has been given another 3.28 acres of Evergreen Forest land for his 'Unity Farm' project, by the same 'ATDC' that he is a member of. It was announced via Aurnet and [News and Notes](#) as 'Special Project Approval' which is a seemingly new procedure where community feedback is no longer sought. You can find the dimension of the new plot of the Unity Farm [here](#).

To make use of the plot, the project holders will have to clear the land as it has dense forest vegetation planted by Evergreen forest stewards, who were not informed of any of the approvals given. This is currently against the NGT judgment of April 2022, as no Detailed Development Plans and no Environmental Clearance have been produced for developing this part of the Auroville project.

61st Governing Board meeting minutes

The [minutes](#) of the 61st Governing Board (GB) meeting that took place in November 2022 have now been posted on the AVF website. As [noted](#) by the RA WCom in a massbulletin announcement, the 60th & 62nd minutes are still not publicly available. It is highly unusual for the GB meeting minutes to be withheld from the community in this manner. The RA WCom has announced that “a note on our observations is being prepared which we will share with the community & the Governing Board as soon as it is available.”

Crown Road chaos - latest report

Following on from the [report](#) sent in February regarding the ongoing works on the Crown Road, Satprem shared a further [technical report](#) detailing the progress of the roadworks. As Satprem predicted, the slabs delivered to the site so far do not fit together properly, meaning that the contractor has been forced to take remedial action. Workers have been using power tools to [carve out](#) the concrete slabs in order to be able to lay them. It has also been necessary to bend a number of the [metal rods](#) that protrude from the slabs. Many pieces of the road are showing [significant damage](#) and the small amount of road that has been laid so far is already in a poor condition and, according to Satprem, will not withstand everyday use. Satprem states that it “shows once more that the ATDC appointed by the Secretary did not study anything properly and did not consider how to implement the system.”

Satprem is calling for the works to be paused and for two audits to be implemented, one technical and one financial.

Upcoming General Meeting on 1st April

The RA TDC is calling for a General Meeting on Saturday, 1st of April, to give an update on their work. All are invited to come.

Auroville
GENERAL MEETING
Saturday 1.4.2023
From 5:00- 6:30pm
At Unity Pavilion

The RA TDC invites the whole community for an update on progress made for planning Auroville.

Auroville Tdc
Town Development Council

Looking forward to seeing you there!

ஆரோவில் பொதுக் கூட்டம்
சனிக்கிழமை 1.4.2023
மாலை 5:00 முதல் 6:30 மணி வரை
யூனிட்டி பெவிலியனில்

RAவின் நகர அமைப்புக் குழுவானது (TDC) ஆரோவில் திட்டப்பணிகளின் விவரங்களை பகிர அனைத்து குடியிருப்பாளர்களையும் அழைக்கிறது.

Auroville Tdc
Town Development Council

அனைவரையும் சந்திக்கும் ஆவலுடன்

RA Working Groups updates

AV Council on Entry Board Selection

The AV Council informed the community via [massbulletin](#) that Fabienne, one of the people selected to the Entry Board at the selection process (SP) last month, will not be taking up her position and has withdrawn her membership “by common agreement”. This decision was taken because Fabienne did not take part in an interview on the day of the SP. After a complaint was made by another of the potential selectees, the AV Council conducted an “intensive review” of the Participatory Working Groups (PWG) document after which it was decided that the conditions for her selection had not been fully met. The Council stated that “the vacant position in Entry Board will remain so until the next selection process is held and that Fabienne is a welcomed nominee for any Working Group”.

AV Council on RAS - Call for new members

The Auroville Council has shared via [massbulletin](#) that they are looking for new RAS members to join the existing team. If you are interested you can reach out to them at avcouncil@auroville.services, or Whatsapp Sathiya, the AVC Secretary, at 9047240618. Please note that the email address of AVC cannot be reached by sending an email from an [@auroville.org.in](#) account.

Media & Other Links

- **Auroville - One Day:** [Youtube video](#) showing some highlights from the 'One Day' singing event.
- **Auroville Governance: Democracy & Dictatorship:** An Aurovilian has [shared their personal reflections](#) about Auroville governance in the current context.
- **Developing the City of The Mother:** [Maël's recent blog](#) about how to define Mother's City.
- **Water Mela video:** [Youtube video](#) about the Water Mela, in English & Tamil
- **In India, Sacred Groves Are Helping Resurrect a Near-Extinct Forest Ecosystem:** [An inspiring article](#) about how Aurovilian forest stewards are working to revive sacred groves in Tamil Nadu.

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://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 - 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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