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Auroville Bulletin 84

Large scale forest clearances and Revelation Sanctuary under threat

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

Friday, 11th October 2024

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

How can you help?

Urgent actions

- **Sri Ma needs help to prevent erosion:** There is a very real threat to the Srma community with the beach eroding more and more each day (see Bulletin 82 for more information). People are needed to help put the Geo Textile in place to slow down the erosion. To stay informed of volunteer day timings at Sri Ma, [join this Whatsapp group](#).
- **Support for Maintenances:** The funds collected to support individuals cut off from their maintenances are running out. For more information, please contact the BCC: bccoffice@auroville.services. If you wish to support the Farm or Forest Group specifically, please contact these groups via evolvingalaxy@gmail.com.
- **Support the RA News and Notes:** The RA News and Notes needs financial support to continue functioning. If you can, please consider donating by making a transfer to Financial Service account number #252150. To read all issues and subscribe, [click here](#).

Ongoing actions

- **Assist with documenting tree-cutting and clearing:** In light of the recent 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 evolvingalaxy@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:** 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.

Errata from Bulletin 83

In the article on Dehashakti in Bulletin 83, there was an oversight. The message that was shared from a Dehashakti teacher was not an email for all parents but a Whatsapp message meant only for the parents of a specific class.

What is happening now

Forest clearances continue at pace

Northern Forest Area cleared for road to hill site

A 6 meter wide road has been cleared through Auroville's [Northern Forest Area](#) (NFA), in order to gain access to the area that has been earmarked for a [30 meter tall hill](#) to be built from the soil excavated from the Matrimandir Lake. This project threatens the forest sanctuary and wildlife in the area. Find out about the history of the NFA sanctuary and wildlife breeding ground [here](#).

The land where the hill is being built is jointly owned by Auroville and Michael Bonke. So far, 6 acres of land have been cleared at the hill site and approximately 10 more acres are earmarked for clearance in the future. For reference, this is approximately equivalent to 5 times the size of the Gaia sports field.



Watch [here](#) a drone video of the clearing.

Michael Bonke and the Matrimandir (MM) team are coordinating the project, which will see 1 million cubic meters of soil transported by lorry from the MM to the hillsite over the next two years. The planned height of the hill means that it will tower above the current canopy level, which is around 10 meters high. Michael Bonke claims that after the soil has been transported, the cleared areas will be replanted, however concerns have been raised that it will not be possible to prevent development in that area now that there is a roadway.

Michael Bonke is now de facto in charge of three major projects in Auroville: the MM Lake, the sections of the Crown road not already tendered out to CPWD, and now what is commonly being called 'Michael Bonke's hill'. There has been absolutely no consultation with the community about the hill and as of now, no Environmental Impact Assessment on the project has been done. Pertinent questions are being asked such as:

- Have the correct mining permissions been received?
- Have there been assessments as to the effect the hill will have on groundwater and rainwater runoff?
- Have owners of neighbouring plots been consulted about the shade that a 30m hill will cast on their agriculture?
- Where in the Master Plan is this hill shown?

One reason that has been used to justify this project is that the Mother mentioned a hill in Auroville. One of the stewards of the land has questioned this in an essay called '[The Last Dance](#)', stating that "insinuating that building an artificial hill is actually Her idea, is not only disturbing but highly dishonest. Mother, it is true, did mention a hill to some devotees close to a century ago. But this, as you know, was at a time when She was vaguely contemplating the possibility of settling, with Sri Aurobindo, on some land in the Deccan, where, in fact, there are natural hills formed by the Deccan traps. She certainly did not ask her devotees to create an artificial hill on this plateau by smothering existing forests and naturally regenerating Ebony so that they may enjoy the view at sunset."

A dialogue was held between Michael Bonke and the NFA stewards, but the road project was presented as a *fait accompli*, and the stewards were informed that the AVFO 'ATDC' had already 'given permission'. Eventually one of the three stewards of the land gave some assistance with the clearing. Bonke was reportedly keen to use the land already owned by Auroville to move the soil as moving soil across public roads requires certain permits.

Nine Palms plot cleared without consultation for Eco-Service landfill

Without communicating or warning the stewards, a plot of land measuring roughly half an acre was cleared from Nine Palms for a new Eco-Service landfill. It appears that the AVFO 'ATDC' identified and allocated the plot in Nine Palms without consulting anyone with knowledge about Auroville's forests and watersheds. This plot is situated directly above a major water catchment area, with the first aquifer lying about 15m below the surface in summer. Using the site for landfill waste of an unknown grade may contaminate the water table. Additionally, it has been one of the few fertile plots in Nine Palms for the last 25 years, previously used to cultivate peanuts and local grains. Please see [here](#) for a report about the area that was cleared.



Figure 2 Entrance of site



Figure 3 Overview of site

The issue of where to dump the Auroville landfill waste has been a matter of urgency for around one month, due to neighbours blocking access to the previous site. The Eco-Service team had then taken the problem to the AVFO 'ATDC', who initially did not respond to the email requests for action. After some time the Eco-Service team took the drastic action of dumping several loads of landfill waste at Town Hall in order to get the attention of the AVFO 'ATDC'. This is when the AVFO 'ATDC' went on to allocate the plot in Nine Palms without speaking to the stewards. However, Nine Palms is also surrounded by private land, and so this issue could arise again.

[Rubbish at town hall](#)

AVFO 'ATDC' plans to clear path for Outer Ring Road through Revelation

The stewards of Revelation Forest have been informed that the CPWD will soon begin clearing the path for the Outer Ring Road through the Sanctuary, a portion of forest that was meant to be free from human intervention and that is home to several protected and endangered species.



The AVFO 'ATDC' is insisting that the Outer Ring Road take the form of a 'perfect circle' through Revelation Forest. However, several stretches of the planned roads have already been adjusted away from a circle based on land availability and ownership. A less destructive route for the Outer Ring is possible through Revelation, if it follows existing electric lines. However, so far, the AVFO 'ATDC' refuses to consider this alternate route (the alternative route is in red on [this map](#)).

Please see [here](#) for a 2012 study into the regeneration of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest in the Revelation Sanctuary.

Afsanah GH & PTPS update

As mentioned in Bulletin 83, the AVFO 'FAMC' are attempting to take over Afsanah's Guest House (AGH) by installing executives of their choosing without following the [Code of Conduct \(CoC\)](#) process or producing the required documents with valid signatures. Additionally, they are also attempting to remove Joel, one of the executives of PTPS, via a [trust resolution](#). As the resolution was signed by Joseba who is impersonating a member of the WCom but is not part of the legally-recognized RA WCom, it is not valid.

In a [massbulletin](#) dated 06.09.24, the RA WCom called out the actions, stating "We question the replacement of people who have proven they are up to the tasks they took on, and who wholeheartedly give their service to Auroville.... and we need to question the motives behind these arbitrary decisions to remove them". They also shared a [timeline](#) of the attempted takeover of PTPS as well as a [second statement](#) from the AGH team. The newly appointed trustees and executives have been actively blocking basic services such as email, internet, food and housekeeping supplies from PTDC and HERS as well as access to the Guest House Portal. They have also cut the maintenances of the legitimate management team.

These actions are not only hindering the work of the AGH team but are directly affecting the experience of guests and damaging the reputation of Afsanah Guest House. The illegality of the actions of the AVFO 'WCom' and 'FAMC' was further reinforced by a legal notice & legal opinion that was shared by WCom on 20th September.

A [petition](#) objecting to these recent actions of the 'GB FAMC' was launched on 28th August, signed by 539 residents.

AVFO: no new Secretary but three new Deputy Secretaries

The Auroville Foundation has announced via a [recruitment notification](#) that there will be three new Deputy Secretaries, alongside a new Undersecretary, recruited to work in the AVFO. The new positions are Deputy Secretary (Security), Deputy Secretary (Accounts and Audit), Deputy (Administration). Remuneration for the roles range between Rs. 78,800 – 2,09,200 per month, at the same time as many residents have stopped receiving their maintenances. The creation of the three new roles was originally shared in the [66th GB meeting minutes](#), and continues the trend of increased bureaucratization in the AVFO.

There also appears to be uncertainty around the departure of Dr Jayanti Ravi from her role as Secretary. Although her departure seemed to be confirmed in July 2024 when it was [announced](#) that she would be repatriated back to her State Cadre in Gujarat, a [report](#) in the Times of India on 16th September claimed that she may “continue to hold additional charge of the [Auroville] Foundation”. According to the article, an officer holding dual responsibilities would be a “rare phenomenon”. This information however, based on hearsay, has not yet been confirmed by any official news source.

Other Updates and Information

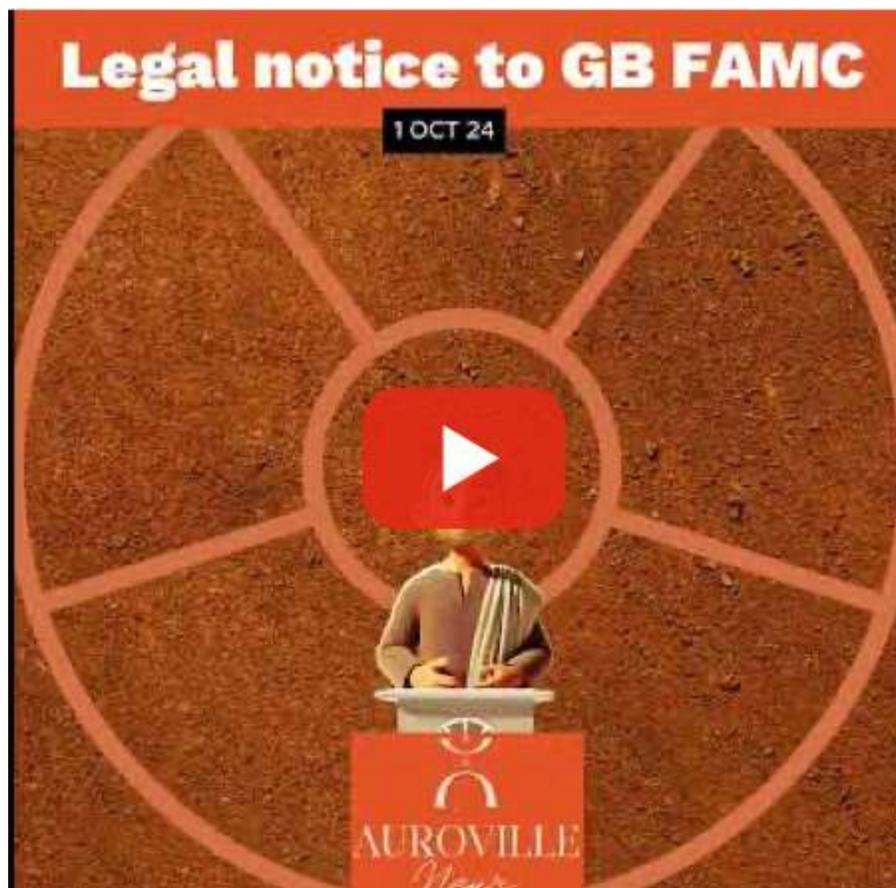
Legal opinions & Legal Notice

Legal opinions on the current status of the [RA WCom](#) and the [Admissions Committee](#) (Entry Board) have been shared with the community via massbulletin. This move was taken due to the continuing disregard of court orders by the AVFO and their appointed 'working groups'. The lawyer representing the RA highlighted the court order dated February 2024 and stated that "It is my opinion that there is and can only be one Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly, and no body of persons without the mandate of the Residents' Assembly can claim to be the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly." As none of the AVFO 'WCom' have the mandate and approval of the RA they cannot claim to be the legitimate WCom of the RA, however they continue to do so.

For the Entry Board (EB) the lawyer stated "it is my opinion that the Admissions Committee selected by the Residents Assembly can continue to function under the 2020 Regulations subject to any further or other orders passed by the Hon'ble Madras High Court."

As they do not currently have access to their office, the EB shared that they were continuing work such as contacting the current Newcomers for their self assessments, and other documentation and scheduling clarification on feedback.

Separately, a [legal notice](#) was sent to the AVFO 'FAMC'. The notice highlighted that the AVFO 'FAMC' is relying on the support of an illegitimate group (the AVFO 'WCom') in order to carry out large scale changes such as changing executives and trustees and removing maintenances. The notice directed them to cease their actions, as these changes are not legal. This legal notice was presented in a video by Auroville Media Liaison (AMLS), which can be found below.



On 9th October 2024, the AVFO 'WCom' sent a [massbulletin](#) that made several claims regarding the legal opinion on the status of the Entry Board. Despite making a reference to "the undersigned members" the email was unsigned, however it was immediately followed up with a [second mail](#) which stated "For further clarification, the preceding massbulletin ... was signed "The Working Committee," which is composed of the following members:

Anu, Arun, Joseba, Partha, Selvaraj, Srimoyi (inactive), and Tine".

The following day a [clarification](#) was published on Auronet which directly contradicted this statement: "Srimoyi has resigned from the Working Committee on 21.03.2024, she is neither active nor inactive for the Working Committee, and Anu has resigned since 01.08.2024 from the Working Committee; she acts now as a 'resource person'."

Silver Fund requests ignored by AVFO 'BCC'

Over one year ago, a group of 5 senior members of the Forest Group who had their maintenances taken away requested the AVFO 'BCC' to consider their applications for maintenances under the 'Silver Fund'. At that time they were told that "All new enrolment under the Silver Fund category are on Hold." Since then, there has been no further reply from the AVFO 'working groups', despite the fact that these seniors have "dedicated their working lives and resources to the development of Auroville", and none of them are now receiving any support from Auroville beyond a 'care package', a total of 4800 rs per month (600rs Health Fund, 2200rs lunch scheme and 2000 rs for shopping at PTDC or PTPS).

In order to highlight their urgent situation and hopefully initiate some action from the AVFO 'working groups', the seniors have been writing to the AVFO 'BCC' on a regular basis (six emails since July 2024) to ask for a response to their request. You can see copies of their emails [here](#). In their email dated 12th August 2024, they stated "Despite our two previous emails ... you have still not responded, nor explained the reasons for your procrastination, nor why you consider that these 5 seniors ... deserve from you such a lack of tact, attention, respect, fraternity, spiritual compassion, gratitude, and kindness, generosity, equality and peace".

Land Report

An Aurovilian has written an in-depth report on the current land situation in Auroville. Important points in the report include:

- **PKS Case:** There is an ongoing court case regarding illegally occupied land near Evergreen. A resolution is expected by mid-October.
- **Mailam Swami Land:** Temple land is being sold illegally through unregistered leases.
- **Land Exchange Controversy:** The AVFO 'Land Board' attempted more land exchanges, but the registration was denied due to queries from the Collector via the Land Administration Commissioner.
- **TV Kannan:** Kannan previously exchanged several plots of low value inside the Master Plan area for 10 acres of Auro Orchard. He has recently purchased 4.24 acres near Matrimandir, from a family who has Aurovilian members. Kannan also retains land near the elephant tower.
- **Auroville Families- Land Sales:** Two families with Aurovilian members sold land to outsiders. One of the families had a sale agreement with the 'Land Board' that was discarded.
- **Land Board Corruption Concerns:** A 'Land Board' member issued an NOC for disputed property to a relative, raising corruption concerns.
- **Sea Erosion:** Aurovilians taking stopgap measures to protect Auroville land from erosion while no action is taken by the AVFO or their 'Land Board'.
- **Land Board Membership:** There have been several resignations and apparently only one member, a person who was appointed by the Secretary, has access to the emails.
- **CPWD Survey:** Surveyors working outside Master Plan area, raising concerns about land use intentions.

Read the [detailed report](#) for more information.

Update on visas

The visa situation in Auroville is a continued concern. On 22nd May 2024, Mr. Koshy Varghese, the AVFO officer for visa matters, met with Auroville Forest Group members following accusations of financial non-compliance from the AVFO 'FAMC'. Mr. Varghese reportedly advised forest stewards to comply with directives from Governing Board-appointed groups. Forest Group members who were present clarified that they were following all the processes agreed with the BCC.

Over the following months, Mr. Varghese held meetings with groups of non-Indian Auroville residents, often grouped by nationality.

According to the RA WCom's latest [report](#), published on 17th August, visa extensions were issued to several Aurovilians between May and July 2024. However, most received only 1-year extensions rather than the usual 5 years. For residents whose previous visas had expired months prior, the new visas' duration starts retroactively from the expiration date of their previous visa. This means these residents now have to start the process of reapplying again immediately - a financially and procedurally challenging situation for many. Additionally, several Aurovilians still remain stuck abroad without a Letter of Recommendation, while others have exceeded the duration of their stay and are stuck in Auroville without a valid visa.

On 20th August 2024, a resident reported attending a meeting called by Mr. Varghese with German, Ukrainian and Chinese residents. The meeting allegedly emphasized India's generosity in granting 5-year visas to Auroville. At that time, it was also stated that currently no AVFO staff are authorized to sign Letters of Recommendation for Auroville visas. For several months after her transfer as Secretary, Jayanti Ravi still retained the power to sign letters of recommendation. However, this power has now reportedly been given by the Chairman of the GB to an Officer on Special Duty, G. Seetharaman. A number of letters of recommendation have been signed in recent days - while some cases are still pending.

Two Aurovilians who received 'Leave India' notices, RA WCom member Maël and Satprem, are currently in Auroville for short visits. Due to visa restrictions neither are working during their visits, however their presence has allayed fears that either of them are 'blacklisted'.

Forest art exhibition

In June 2024, a mystery exhibition was organised in a forest of Auroville, paying homage to the area where the pioneers first began to build Auroville. Titled “Artists in Response”, it showcased the creative expression of 24 artists in response to the current crisis. Despite there being no official communication regarding its existence nor its initiators, over the span of a week, 300+ residents visited the site, as news spread on a word of mouth basis. Among the fifty pieces — a wide variety that included interactive installations, panels, paintings, ceramics, metal sculptures, to name a few — every evening there were small events such as screenings of short movies or photo collages. These were accompanied by juice and snacks, creating the opportunity for people to come together in the middle of nature. On the last day, as an unplanned closing ceremony, 100 Aurovilians joined in sharing a moment together by sitting in a semi-circle in a clearing beside a giant banyan tree. Read [N&N n.1034](#) for a personal account of this experience.



Media & Other Links

- September 14th 2024, **RA Forest Caretakers**: [Humorous Newsletter no.0](#)
- September 30th 2024, **Auroville Media Liaison Service**: [Introducing a New Way to Stay Informed about Auroville](#)
- October 7th 2024, **The Hindu**: [Government ties up with Auroville Foundation to bring classical art to international audience](#)
- October 4th 2024, **The Hindu**: [Delegation of diplomats from various nations visit Auroville](#)
- September 26th 2024, **The Hindustan Times**: [Anger, fear and conspiracies loom large over the experimental community of Auroville](#)
- September 26th 2024, **Odisha.plus**: [Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole](#)
- September 18th 2024, **Times of India**: [Lofty dreams turns legal nightmare](#)

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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