

View this email in your browser



Auroville Bulletin 86

Cyclone Fengal, AVFO 'Residence Criteria' and ongoing destruction works

A Summary of Events Happening in Auroville Today

Tuesday, 10th December 2024

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

How can you help?

Urgent actions

- **Support for Auro Orchard:** Auro Orchard is running a fundraising campaign in December through AVI USA. Each donation made will be matched by AVI USA. For more information please see [here](#). Please donate if possible, and share with your networks to help raise awareness.
- **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 by the AVFO working groups. 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 evolvingalaxy@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 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.

What is happening now

AVFO announces 'Code of Conduct' to live in Auroville

On 25th November 2024, the AVFO Officer on Special Duty, Dr. G. Seetharaman, issued a new [Standing Order](#) detailing residence criteria and a code of conduct for Auroville residents. The Standing Order comes after the recent Gazette of India notification regarding [Admissions and Terminations](#) regulations and for the [selection of the Working Committee](#), which were published in January 2024. Both sets of regulations were subsequently [stayed](#) by the Madras High Court in February 2024 following legal challenges from the RA WCom.

The Standing Order establishes strict guidelines for residents, newcomers, volunteers and permanent guests. It outlines "General principles of life in Auroville" and a detailed code of conduct, presenting them as mandatory requirements rather than guidelines, with the stated threat of "termination" of status if the 'rules' are breached.

After the Standing Order was issued, the RA WCom released a [massbulletin](#) stating that the Order "has no grounds" and is "blatantly in contradiction with the Charter, the Dream and the quoted works of Sri Aurobindo." The RA WCom noted that the Order does not respect proper procedure, the spirit of Auroville, or the letter and spirit of the Auroville Foundation Act as recognized by various orders of the Madras High Court.

Some key aspects of the new code of conduct include:

Residency Requirements:

- Full-time residence in Auroville is mandatory
- Any trips must be reported to the Human Resources Service
- Absences exceeding two weeks require prior approval - Unauthorized absences beyond two weeks may result in "status termination"

Guest Accommodation Rules:

- Guests may only stay in allocated residences for a maximum of seven days
- Aurovilians must acquire permission from Human Resources Service to:*
- Host family members beyond seven days
 - Host a spouse
 - Live with elderly parents and minor children as "Permanent Guests"

Other rules:

- Only the AVFO media body can issue press releases about Auroville
- All Aurovilians have mandatory work for 6 hours per day for 6 days per week, or 5 hours per day for 7 days per week
- Pregnant women, nursing mothers, the elderly and the disabled will be offered work "suitable to their condition"
- All those residing in Auroville must attend the Auroville Spiritual and Material Refresher program, organized by the Human Resources Service
- Social gatherings can only be organized in authorized locations that are published by the Funds and Assets Management Committee.

The RA WCom indicated that they will share more information about the Standing Order in the coming days.

Cyclone Fengal causes chaos

Cyclone Fengal made landfall over Puducherry late in the night of 30th November 2024, causing a large amount of damage to the forest, roads, electrical power lines and other infrastructure in and around Auroville. It took several days for the electrical supply to be fully restored, with some homes in Auroville still without power as of 9th December.



Damage to MM Lake

In addition to the loss of several hundreds of trees, the MM lake was severely damaged. The wall of the first lake area, holding water 10m deep, cracked and spilt water into the second lake area which is currently undergoing excavation. At the other end of the lake wall, the HDPE (plastic) lining ripped. These events raise serious concerns about the construction of the lake and its ability to withstand extreme weather conditions.

An [open letter](#) was sent to the MM Executive Team, repeating previous calls to follow proper processes and proceed with an Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) when building the MM lake.

On the 5th December, the MM executives and the lake team shared a report via mass bulletin acknowledging the structural failure of the test lake retaining wall, built using prefab “Lego” blocks. They stated that they had not anticipated the possibility that the dam could experience the following 4 factors simultaneously:

- (1) heavy rainfalls over a short time span
- (2) that the existing site topography would channel the water to the newly excavated section
- (3) that standing water tends to percolate and soften the soils and
- (4) overflow outlet discharge rates need to take into account the inflow rate to prevent a dam breach.

The report states that the financial damage is negligible as the Lego blocks were not damaged (this is incorrect according to photos of the damaged wall). They also stated that they will be saving on the overall cost of the project as they will reuse the Lego blocks for the next section, eliminating the need for a dam wall between the test lake and newly excavated hole.



The decision making of the MM lake project from funding to implementation, including design and engineering has been vested in a single agent. However, instead of undertaking an independent assessment to evaluate the causes for the breaching of the test lake wall, the report states that they intend to use this as an opportunity to implement the lake without phasing. This approach would make it impossible to detect and repair leaks or mitigate an embankment breach. Even in the first completed section of the planned lake, which constitutes approximately 5% of the overall project, constant water leaks have been reported over the past few years.

As well as the damage to the MM lake, there was [observable slippage](#) of the mud hill inside the fence next to Town Hall.

Other Cyclone Damage

The cyclone affected a number of farms and forests across Auroville. Several farms reported loss of fruit trees, flooding of grains and vegetables, loss of poultry, and damage to vital infrastructure. The financial losses from the damages and the costs of repairs are expected to be borne by the farmers, despite maintenances and financial support being cut off from these vital community resources for over 1.5 years. The [Alankuppam-Kottakarai kolam](#) also overflowed, causing severe flooding to homes and farms in the neighbouring villages.

Many roads were blocked due to fallen trees in the cyclone, most of which were cleared by the tireless efforts of individual residents. The AVFO did not initiate any clearing or service to the affected community and the AVFO 'FAMC's initial response to the cyclone was to send an [email](#) informing the community that "Individual wood sale is strictly prohibited". A follow up [email](#) was shared one week after the cyclone, with telephone numbers to call in case of emergencies and information about how to receive funds.



Bridge under construction through Darkali watershed



Ongoing destruction

The construction of Radial 1 from Lilaloka through Revelation Forest continued on 21st November 2024, with CPWD workers using JCBs to break the fence around Revelation, and clear the path of the planned road. As highlighted in [this post](#) from N&N no. 1052, the destruction of this fence means that the forest area is now vulnerable to animal grazing and wood theft. It was also entirely unnecessary, as there was access available via Revelation main gate.

The AVFO reacted strongly to the Revelation Management Team, who attempted to intervene in the destruction and requested to see the relevant paperwork authorising the works. The OSD, Dr Seetharaman, sent a [letter](#) to Arun of Revelation, terminating his position in the AVFO 'GreenBelt Services'. The letter stated that "the obstruction of government authorized works on government property is a criminal offense". Please see [here](#) for a clarification as to why Auroville land is not government property.

On the same day, the OSD also sent a [letter of complaint](#) to the Inspector of the Auroville Police Station demanding that they file FIRs against the Revelation Management Team. The letter stated that their actions were "criminal in nature" and that "the CPWD [and] by extension the AVF Authorities are ... obstructed from performing the duties with regards to the building of the Auroville city which is mandated to the Governing Board by the Auroville Foundation Act". [The AVF Act](#) states that the role of the GB is "to prepare a Master-Plan of Auroville in consultation with the Residents' Assembly and to ensure development of Auroville as so planned". The police went on to file a [Community Service Register](#) (CSR) against Arun.



Vikas Radial

As mentioned in [Bulletin 85](#), work began on the Vikas Radial in October 2024 without any prior notification to the residents of the nearby communities. The removal of the road pavers meant that access to homes and parking were seriously affected. The AVFO 'ATDC' claimed they would rectify the situation and open up alternative access by widening the Grace-Arati cycle path, but the pathway quickly [became impassable](#) due to the monsoon rains.

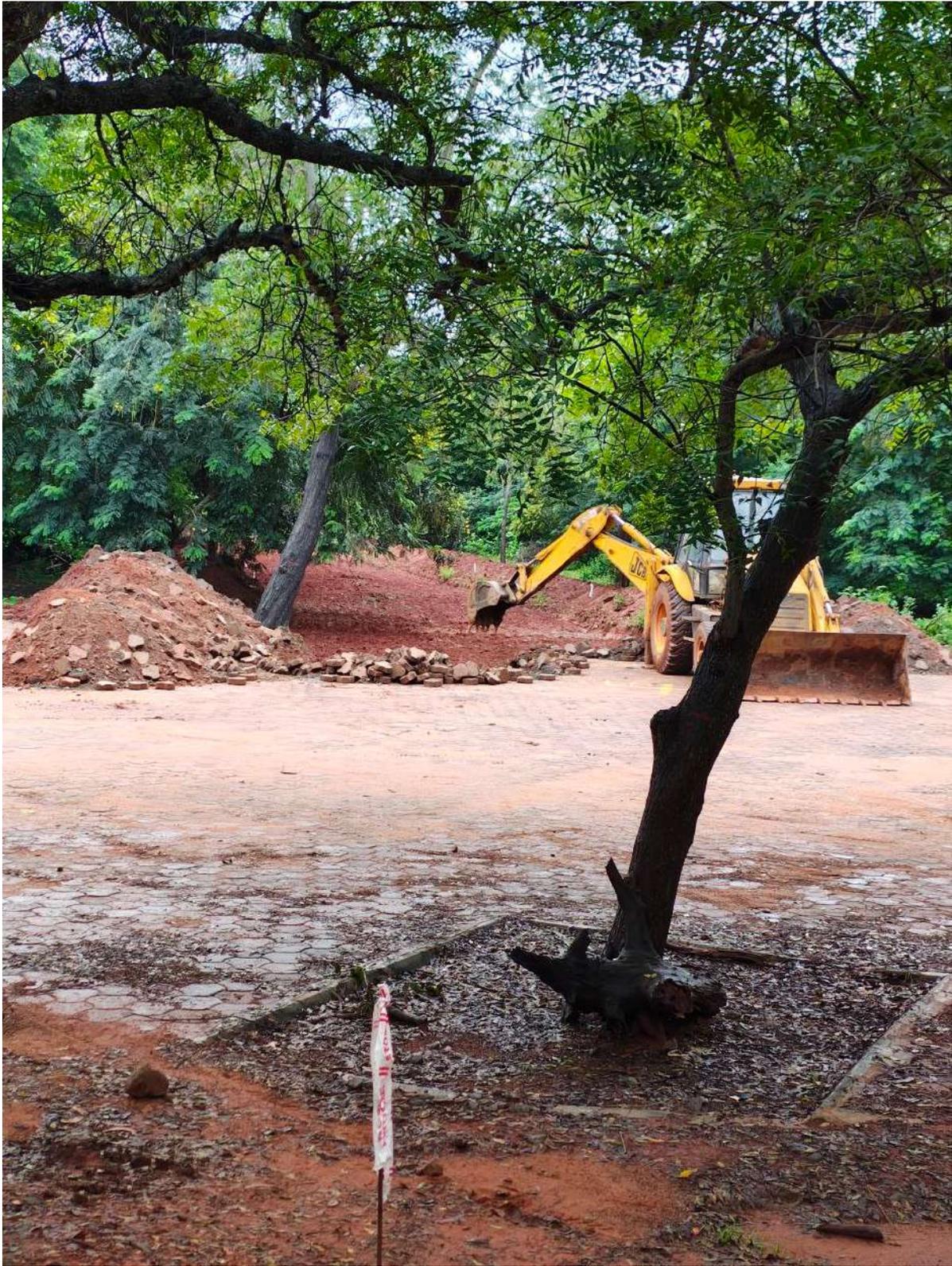
After three days of work residents from several communities emailed the AVFO 'ATDC' and convinced the contractor engineer to stop work until there was a [response](#). AVFO 'ATDC' agreed to a meeting to discuss the situation. On 19th November, members of the AVFO and their 'ATDC' as well as CPWD engineers and their contractors, met with members of nearby communities. Amongst [several other points](#), those at the meeting agreed that the work would not continue until after the end of the monsoon.

However, on 21st November workers using a JCB began taking apart more of the road. After a couple of residents objected in person, Sindhuja, Antim and a large group of Town Hall workers came to the site and threatened the residents with legal action. However, a few of the 'ATDC' members who had been present at the meeting two days before eventually agreed that they had promised to stop the work for the time being, and the group left. Reportedly, the same group of people from Town Hall then went to Revelation Forest to oversee the removal of the fence.

Subsequently Prashant, who is a Landscape Architect and Regional Planner as well as a member of the RA WCom, sent [an email](#) to the AVFO and their 'ATDC'. The email raised a number of pertinent questions about the current roadworks happening across Auroville, both ongoing and planned.

Solar Kitchen Parking Lot

Other recent development works include the partial destruction of the new parking lot opposite Solar Kitchen, for a radial which follows a line of force. The parking lot was built just 2 years ago using some of the paver blocks that were removed from the Crown Road.



Evergreen land grab update

Since PKS won his appeal, which ruled in his favour and handed him Auroville lands inside Evergreen community, he has been actively claiming the land and has cleared a large area of trees and constructed a wall. There has been no official survey carried out to mark the land, nor have the AVFO or their 'Land Service' made any moves to verify the boundaries. They have also not filed an appeal against the decision. Residents of Evergreen have made repeated pleas for assistance to the Land Board and AVFO working groups to secure the land, highlighting that they are facing harassment on a daily basis from PKS's workers, which included a rock being thrown at one resident. The workers also trespass freely through the Evergreen community, even at night.

There is no clarity as to why the AVFO and their 'Land Service' appear unconcerned about such a valuable piece of Auroville land, which has been in the possession of Auroville for over thirty years. The land lies inside the MasterPlan area and it is prime for development due to its roadside location.

Uncertainty about Jayanti Ravi's repatriation

A [response](#) to an RTI request has confirmed that Dr. Jayanti Ravi was repatriated back to her parent cadre in Gujarat in August 2024. Uncertainty about her repatriation had remained due to her occasional presence in Auroville as well as a number of [press reports](#) that named her as the Secretary.

The RA WCom sent out a press note, informing the media that her status was clarified, which led to a [report](#) in The Hindu on 3rd December 2024. The article stated that she had been “prematurely repatriated”, a reference to her one year extension that started in July 2024 which has apparently been cancelled.

On 2nd December, questions regarding the status of Dr. Ravi were asked in the Lok Sabha by VCK MP Ravikumar. The questions referred to whether the position of the Secretary of the AVF was vacant and the reply from the Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan was that the “Ministry of Education has issued tenure-related orders on July 4 [2024]”(a reference to her one year extension).

On 4th December, a [Hindu article](#) based on information from an unnamed source claimed that Dr Ravi’s repatriation had not interfered with her one year extension and she was therefore still the Secretary. The article was later [posted](#) on Auronet by the AVFO ‘WCom’, who claimed that this “confirmed” that Dr Ravi was still the Secretary.

Dr Ravi was present at the 68th GB meeting which was held in Auroville on 5th December. [Press reports](#) after the meeting mentioned that she was present in the Secretary role.

The RA WCom sent a [massbulletin](#) which noted that the August 2024 order was for premature repatriation from the Auroville Foundation to Gujarat, and no orders that show that she holds a dual role have been seen. They also highlight that there is no evidence that Dr. Ravi has signed any documents since the repatriation order, as visa letters of recommendation and the recent residence criteria Standing Order have all been signed by the OSD. The email continues “[We] are very concerned at the lack of transparency and communication on the part of the Governing Board around the question of her holding dual positions. This intentionally opaque way of functioning continues to be a hallmark of this particular administration, led by the Board and its Chairman”.

Other Updates and Information

CPWD Tenders and Works Update

The CPWD has issued [55 tenders for works](#) in Auroville over the past three years, with a combined estimated value of 60 crores, according to the government's E-Tender Portal as of July 2024. Recent tenders include for LED street lighting (1.3 crore), construction of the Outer Ring Road (ORR) from Certitude to VC parking (6.35 crore) and the installation of an elevator in the Town Hall building (55 Lakh). The necessity and the quality of some of these works have been questioned, for example the number of street lights seem to be far more than is needed. [Questions have also been asked](#) as to why the ORR is a narrow road made with paver blocks when it is intended for heavy traffic use.

Prior to 2022, development projects in Auroville were generally carried out by Auroville units. This allowed project funds to recirculate within the community's economy and drew upon decades of home-grown expertise in tropical sustainable construction. The current shift to external contractors represents a significant change in both how development funds flow and how construction expertise is sourced, with favour now being shown for unsustainable materials like cement.

Transparency remains limited for these projects. While the CPWD website contains certain documents, other standard construction documentation such as detailed cost estimates, road project cross-sections, survey reports, and construction drawings have not been shown despite repeated requests from residents.

The matter of environmental clearances for these works remains under legal consideration. While the AVFO 'ATDC' maintains that such clearances are not required for [Patta lands](#), the National Green Tribunal (NGT) had previously ruled that Auroville must follow Government of India environmental regulations due to the scale of development and potential impact on the surrounding villages and agricultural lands. This NGT order was challenged by the Secretary in the Supreme Court and in December 2023 the Supreme Court placed a stay on the NGT order, after which the AVFO began large-scale land clearing.

The RA TDC have also repeatedly expressed concern about the permanent nature of tree removal while the legal status of environmental regulations remains unresolved.

Commercial projects signal shift in AVFO development priorities

Two new projects - one operational and one planned - indicate a growing emphasis on tourism-focused development in Auroville. Le Paradis D'Auro, recently opened, and a Southern Service Node (SSN) mobility hub planned by the AVFO 'FAMC', highlight a shift in priorities for Auroville's growth.

The [Southern Service Node project](#), announced by the AVFO 'FAMC' in September 2024, outlines plans for a large commercial complex featuring seven restaurants, boutique shops, and parking facilities for 90 cars and 420 bikes. According to the project documents, the complex aims to centralize the visitor activities that are currently spread along the Kuyilpalayam road, although the vast majority of those businesses are privately-owned.

[Le Paradis D'Auro](#), which opened recently, markets itself as an educational hub and functions primarily as a display center for various animals including 30 cows, 350 birds across 8 species, horses, guinea pigs, rabbits and other creatures. While the project claims to promote environmental awareness, concerns have been raised about the ethics of confining animals in artificial environments for visitor entertainment.

The AVFO's mobility hub proposal plans to restrict visitor and resident vehicle access beyond the facility, requiring transfer to internal transport. The project documents state that "visitors and residents will switch from fossil-fuel vehicles to e-vehicles or non-polluting modes of transport or public transport". This may not be practical for all road users, and is likely to increase traffic at other entrances.

The planned restriction of the current Certitude entrance in favor of the new Southern Gate would funnel visitors through designated commercial zones before reaching other parts of Auroville. This will highlight Auroville as merely a tourist attraction. The AVFO has apparently secured funding for the SSN building construction but it is not stated from whom.

Electrical Fire in Council Room

On 9th November 2024, an [electrical fire](#) caused by faulty wiring broke out in the Town Hall Council Room. The fire happened during the night, and was brought under control thanks to the quick actions of one of the Council Room vigil watchers, who retrieved a fire extinguisher and put the fire out.

Despite the fact that the presence of a member of the watch helped prevent serious damage, the AVFO 'FAMC' has ordered AVES not to repair the electrical connection. However, another electrician came forward and fixed a connection to the room.

For 2.5 years, a small group of residents have maintained a 24/7 presence in the Council Room. The room has strategic and symbolic significance as the only space in Town Hall still available to the residents and their working groups. More help is always needed, if you can offer any assistance please see above in the 'ongoing actions' section for contact details.

Forest group response to Torkil in AV Today

The Forest Group has released a [detailed statement](#) responding to claims made by Torkil, a member of the AVFO 'FAMC', in a recent Auroville Today interview regarding the management of Auroville's forests. The statement addresses several key points, including the AVFO 'FAMC's' refusal to release gratuity payments for 60 forest workers laid off in July 2023, and disputes Torkil's assertion that the Forest Group was unwilling to discuss changes.

The statement strongly challenges Torkil's claim that only 12-18 people are needed to manage Auroville's forests, pointing out that Auroville's afforestation project is unique in India, with no comparable government or non-government initiatives. The Forest Group emphasizes that their successful approach involves continuous planting of rare and endangered species, maintenance of extensive fence lines, and management of nurseries and seed banks. Torkil's statement suggests that the abrupt cutting of funds in July 2023 appears to be part of a larger strategy to silence the Forest Group's voice regarding ongoing development projects in forested areas, rather than purely an economic measure as suggested by Torkil.

Miscellaneous News

- **Issue 7 of the Voice of Auroville:** RA WCom have shared the latest issue of the Voice of Auroville, available at [this link](#). Previous issues are available [here](#).
- **Removal of News & Analysis from Auronet:** The removal of a group which provided relatively unbiased updates about Auroville news demonstrates that the censorship of Auronet continues. Jothi Charles [shared](#) that his group “News and Analysis” had been removed in November 2024. The group was notable for occasionally sharing information that was critical of the AVFO, in particular the criticism by the Central Information
- **An Offering to the Community:** A short booklet, written in English, French and Tamil, has been anonymously circulated in Auroville. Called ‘[An Offering to the Community](#)’ it outlines “some notes and propositions to be shared, contemplated, developed so as to commit, each and all, to a more conscious and more humble process of evolution, offered to the task before us all, at the service of Truth.”
- **Hindu Articles:** Two articles on Auroville, written by Aurovilians with differing opinions about the takeover of Auroville, appeared in The Hindu in November 2024. The first, titled “[A case for the organic, harmonious growth of Auroville](#)” was written by Francios Gaultier and the second, titled “[Land consolidation for the city area is being overseen in a professional way](#)” was written by Anu Majumdar.

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.

You receive this email because you have joined the newsletter **Evolving Galaxy** With the address evolvinggalaxy@gmail.com.

[Unsubscribe](#) to no longer receive emails from us.