

New hope for the roads

Dr. Jayanti Ravi, the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation, recently has looked into the possibility to build the remaining section of the Crown Road with all components being manufactured in Auroville and using Auroville resources for its construction. Michael Bonke and his team have offered to organise this and even take up organising the finances for the project. Michael explains the new development, his plans for this and other roads and his hope that this new development will help in bringing people in Auroville together.

Auroville Today: Michael, can you tell us what has happened?

Michael: 2,552 metres of the Crown (phase 1) has been done by Central Public Works Department (CPWD). 155 metres (phase 2) will still be done by the CPWD. 170 metres are connectivity portions like culverts etc. This also is already under contract with the CPWD. 984 metres (phase 3) has been given to us now. In addition to this there are 498 metres where the land still has to be purchased. This part of the Crown also is planned to be done by us. So in total we intend to take care of 1.4 km of the crown.

Till now the Crown has been built with big concrete slabs which are manufactured in Bangalore and are transported all the way from there by lorries to Auroville. If we make the road in-house, meaning in Auroville and by Aurovilians or Auroville units, we can make it cheaper, faster and I think even better. Auroville with its Road Service and a good number of engineers is well equipped to do the job.

What are the major changes?

The biggest change is that we use paver blocks instead of the large concrete slabs. Another change is that we will do away with the concept of a water duct at the side of the road to collect run-off water. The original idea was that the water so collected would flow into the Darkali pond, be purified, and from there be pumped into the Matrimandir Lake. For this reason the Crown has been constructed at the same level, at certain places higher than the plinth level of the buildings that border it. As there is a height-difference of 13 meters from the East of the Crown to the West, this concept has to be discarded. We will continue having concrete ducts along the road, but only for infrastructure such as pipes and cables. The ducts along the built stretch of the Crown will be modified – we'll close the holes – and also use them for this purpose. A major change is therefore that we will build the Crown parallel to the contours of the area. Also our concept of the right-of-way is different. We will not cut all the trees which are within the 24 meter wide right-of-way. Only trees which are on the carriage (7 meter width) or on the place for the ducts will have to be removed.

You'll use the same type of pavers that were used for the old road?

No. Our pavers have to match the standards for traffic-roads according to the rules of the CPWD and must have the strength of M-50. The old Auroville pavers have a load-bearing capacity of M-40. Secondly, the old pavers had a height of only 80 mm. The new ones will have a height of 120 mm. Mr. Goel, the former head of the Central Public Works Department who is at present the Chief Advisor to the Auroville Foundation, is helping us to match the standards prescribed for roads.

The work has been allocated to you and your team. But you are also involved in many other activities. How do you manage that?

This focus on me as an individual is a bit misleading. There is a team of people who have agreed to do the work. Auroville has many experts in the construction sector. The Road Service has a lot of experience in making pavers, there are specialists in concrete casting, there are free-lance engineers with experience in paver



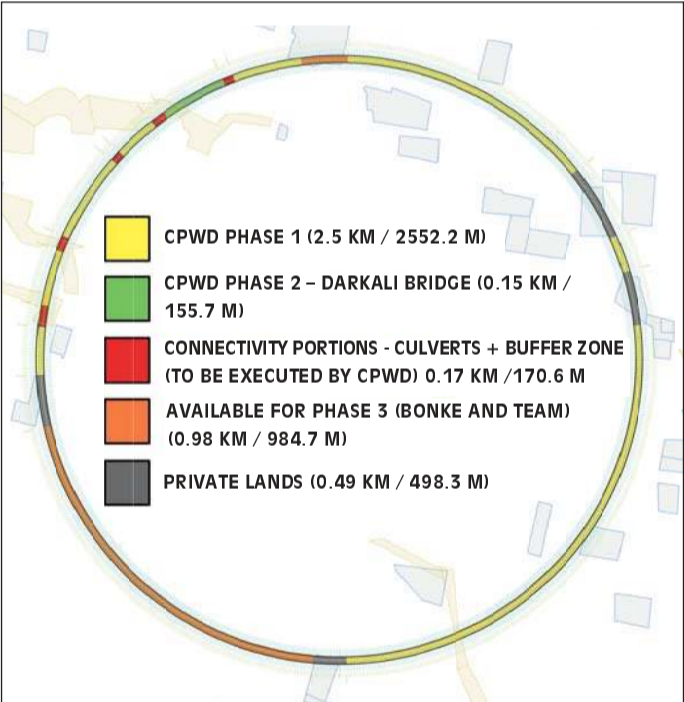
Paver block making at the Auroville Road Service.

work. We also have urban designers in Auroville, landscapers, architects like the Dreamweavers team etc. My role will be the coordination of the team (especially in the beginning), the coordination of the finances and the interaction with the Auroville Foundation Office and the TDC. Once the project is on its way, my role in the matter hopefully will be much less active.

The Crown Road is planned to go over lands that do not belong to Auroville. Will you be involved in land purchase negotiations?

This is not yet clear. Land-negotiations tend to be difficult, but private parties have sometimes more flexibility in land-purchase and are therefore more successful. Aditi Diamonds Pvt. Ltd. and Varuna Pvt. Ltd. purchased nice pieces of lands outside of Auroville a number of years ago. We could maybe exchange those pieces against land on the crown, if required.

The tree-cutting in connection with the road construction in Auroville has caused a lot of resentment. You mention that no more trees will be cut.



The Crown Road showing the built and to be built segments.

In principle everybody here is happy about the beautiful forest areas we have created in Auroville. And equally, everybody is aware that you cannot build a city without cutting some of the trees. But the politicisation of trees as a weapon against construction projects on one side and on the other side the appetite for an over-designed "right of way" for infrastructure has led to a situation where mistakes have been made unnecessarily. We would be well advised to de-politicise the tree-issue, which then could lead to a situation that trees will not be cut anymore prophylactically, when one has the chance to do so.

Who will make the paver blocks?

The Auroville Road Service. They have two machines, and they have already made the first batch according to the new formula. Those pavers are being cured for 28 days, after which they will be sent to IIT in Chennai or PEC in Pondicherry to be tested. If we have reached the required M50 standard, then we can start. We have calculated that with the two machines and people working in two eight-hour shifts, we can produce 3,000 pavers a day. The first stretch of the Crown Road we'll build is 984 meters long. That will take us about three months, not counting the underlay work. The



The Crown Road nearby Kalpana community. A retaining wall is being built to prevent earth from the roadside flushing into Kalpana.

Auroville Transport Service has agreed that we can use its space for curing and storing all those paver blocks.

And the duct channels?

The duct channels will be made by Eric. We have found a place for him to make the ducts in the Industrial Zone on a piece of land which we are preparing for constructing a Line of Force.

Who pays for all this?

Although the Secretary has offered several times to use Government funds for this project, we prefer to use private funds or donations from our circle of Auroville-donors.

Is there a written agreement with the Auroville Foundation?

There are of course minutes of the meetings, for example TDC meetings, which reflect our agreements. But otherwise nobody till now has demanded any agreement in writing. Neither has the Road Service asked us for a written agreement, nor any of the participating Aurovilians, nor anybody else. This is one of the nice traits of the project, that we all are convinced of its success and that we do this in a team-spirit.

You mentioned the involvement of the Dreamweavers.

Yes, we are all very open to the idea that they participate in this work. We also tried to find a consultant and we contacted Professor Rahul Mehrotra, a professor of Urban Design and Planning at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. He had promised to visit Auroville in March, but then did not come because of having Covid. We are waiting for the urban design architects we contacted to come back to us.



Ducts along an unfinished stretch of the Crown Road. All holes will now be closed.

Do you expect opposition to your team manifesting this second stretch of the Crown as specified by you?

I hope not, but given my experience in Auroville, it is definitely possible. We want to start building this road as soon as possible, and nobody would like to get entangled in endless discussions with members of this or that working group who may have, or think they have, the authority to 'approve' the project. Till now most of the people who are on board have not put up any preconditions for community participation, probably because we all know that this development is in the positive interest of the whole of Auroville. If all of us can show the willingness to cooperate, this project might be a help to bridge the divisions which are now harming the community so much.

In conversation with Alan and Carel

The pending court cases

There have been many requests for clarity on the background and status of the numerous court cases that are pending in various courts in India, including in the Supreme Court of India, regarding the present situation in Auroville. Here we give some background of the Auroville project and an insight into the nature and status of the various cases pending in Indian courts.



The Supreme Court of India in New Delhi

The Auroville Foundation Act 1988

In 1988, when the term of the Auroville Emergency Provisions Act 1980 came to a close, the Government of India prepared a new Act. It had found that “Under the management of the Central Government and under the overall guidance of the International Advisory Council set up under the aforesaid Act [*the Auroville Emergency Provisions Act 1980, eds.*]. Auroville had been able to develop during the last eight years along several important lines and the residents of Auroville have also carried on activities for the development of Auroville which need further encouragement and consolidation.” The Central Government therefore promulgated the Auroville Foundation Act 1988, “An Act to provide for the acquisition and transfer of the undertakings of Auroville and to vest such undertakings in a foundation established for this purpose, with a view to making long-term arrangements for the better management and further development of Auroville in accordance with its original Charter and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.” As Auroville’s assets were created with the aid of donations received from different organisations and individuals inside and outside India, the Government acquired these assets without paying any compensation, to vest them later in the Auroville Foundation. The Auroville Foundation came into existence on 29th January 1991, and the assets were transferred to it on April 1, 1992.

The authorities of the Foundation

The Auroville Foundation Act states that it has three authorities: (1) a nine-member Governing Board nominated by the Government of India (GB); (2) a five-member International Advisory Council nominated by the Government of India (IAC); and (3) the Residents' Assembly (RA), which is composed of all the adult inhabitants of Auroville whose names have been entered into the Register of Residents.

The Central Government also appoints a Secretary to the Foundation to "exercise such powers and perform such duties under the Chairman of the Governing Board as may be prescribed or as may be delegated to him by the Chairman." The Act further states that there will be a statutory body called the Working Committee which shall assist the Residents' Assembly or, as the case may be, the Governing Board, in discharging its duties under this Act.

The court cases

This ‘three authorities’ structure has functioned with a good level of harmonious collaboration for over 30 years. However, a major crisis erupted in 2021-22 when the new GB and its officers took decisions affecting the community, including setting up its own working groups, without consulting the RA. The GB and its Secretary took the position that, as the Act had vested the general superintendence, direction and management of the affairs of the Foundation in the Governing Board, which was authorised to exercise all the powers and discharge all the functions which may be exercised or discharged by the Foundation, there was no need to interact with the RA. The RA argued that this viewpoint was not in accordance with the Act. This has led to many court cases being filed by Aurovilians relating to either governance or environmental matters. Some criminal cases have also been filed by the Auroville Foundation office against some Aurovilians.

The National Green Tribunal verdict and appeal

The Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (Perspective 2025) is a perspective and directional document that was approved in 2001 by the Ministry of Human Resources Development (HRD) - now Ministry of Education (MoE) - and published by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation in the Gazette of India in 2010. It came officially into force on the date of the publication. The Plan states that 5-year development plans and annual plans have to be made. However, these have never materialised.

A critical problem in the envisaged implementation of the Master Plan was that some of the roads and infrastructure were planned in areas where for decades extensive afforestation and greenwork had been done. For many years there was heated debate and disagreement within the community on whether to adjust the alignment of the roads to preserve the vegetation or not. With the appointment of a new Secretary and a new Governing Board, a major crisis erupted in December 2021 with the forceful execution of development works in some forested areas, in some cases with police and hired enforcers [*see AVToday # 390, January 2022*].

After the Foundation had felled many trees in the Bliss forest area and demolished structures in the Youth Centre to clear a path for the

Crown Road, two residents filed a petition with the Southern Bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in Chennai. The Tribunal issued an immediate Stay Order on the felling of trees, clearing land and all new development work, and gave its verdict in April 2022. The Bench directed the Auroville Foundation not to fell any more trees for the Crown Road until a Joint Committee, appointed by it, had inspected the area and made a report concerning whether, by reducing the width of the road at suitable places or through a slight realignment, the number of trees to be cut could be minimised in accordance with The Mother’s vision of creating a green cover. It also directed the Joint Committee to spell out the way in which the road would have to be constructed without affecting any water body / water flow. The Foundation, moreover, was directed to plant trees in the ratio of 1:10 for the number of trees to be cut, in order to protect the environment and to maintain the green cover in that area.

The NGT, considering it an exceptional circumstance, granted conditional permission to the Foundation to complete the Crown Road in the remaining stretches where there were no trees and to take action against unauthorised occupations, if any, in accordance with the law, even before obtaining environmental clearance for further activity. But it directed the Foundation to prepare a proper township plan, which would need to outline the locations where the roads would have to be laid, along with their width, and the nature of industries and other activities planned, and then apply for Environmental Clearance (EC).

The Secretary of the Auroville Foundation appealed the Tribunal’s verdict in the Supreme Court of India, in August 2022. In December 2023, the Supreme Court ordered an Interim Stay on the verdict. Since then, thousand of trees and undergrowth have been cut, including protected species, so as to clear the paths for the Outer Ring Road and the radial roads, even though their locations had not been defined in the Auroville Universal Township Master Plan (Perspective 2025). The final hearing in the Supreme Court is still to take place.

The Auroville Town Development Council (ATDC)

According to the Auroville Foundation Act, both the GB and the RA have a role in the preparation and formulation of the Master Plan. A Town Development Council (TDC) was constituted in 2011 for its implementation. The Aurovillian members in the TDC were selected by the Residents' Assembly and their nominations were confirmed by the Governing Board through an office order.

In 2021 the GB issued a Standing Order reconstituting the TDC, renaming it ATDC (the ‘A’ stands for Auroville) and appointing its members without any consultation with the RA. Two cases were filed in the Madras High Court on this matter. One judgment was in favour of the GB, when the Court sustained the Standing Order on the condition that the Auroville Foundation would issue a corrigendum as to under which provision of the Act the Order had been passed. Another was in favour of the RA. Both cases were then appealed at the Division Bench of the Madras High Court.

On March 15, 2024, the division bench of the Madras High Court struck down as *ultra vires* and illegal the Standing Order of the GB. The bench judged that the Auroville Foundation Act entrusts the functions of formulating the Master Plan to the RA and the final preparation and approval thereof to the GB. It also found that the Act does not authorise the GB to constitute committees that have no GB member as committee member. The bench found that the Standing Order enabling the GB or the Secretary to appoint ATDC members, without the nomination / selection emanating from the RA, does not align with the scheme of the Act, nor with the scheme laid out in the Auroville Master Plan. For the same reason, the court also judged the constitution of the ATDC Advisory Group by the GB as *ultra vires* of the Act. The bench stated that with the Standing Order, the GB had arrogated the entire powers of the RA to itself and had virtually nullified its existence and role vis-à-vis the Master Plan. The bench, while setting aside the Standing Order, stated that it will be open for the GB to frame fresh regulations in tune with the provision of the Act and the observations made in the order of the bench.

The Auroville Foundation has appealed the judgement in the Supreme Court of India which, on April 29th, stayed the judgement of the High Court. The case is pending.

The functioning of the Residents' Assembly and its Working Committee

The GB’s forceful actions to implement the controversial Crown Road development were followed by an attempt to progressively takeover the functions of the RA. The Working Committee members

at that time were divided on how to respond to the new situation. For this reason, the RA called for a confidence vote on the group and each single member in April and May 2022. Three members were approved to be able to continue by over 90% of the almost 900 participants and four members were dismissed by over 90% of the participants.

The Office of the Secretary, however, tried to prevent the vote by issuing a letter stating that all decision-making processes must stop, alleging that the Register of Residents had not been updated since 2005 (which was factually incorrect). The Office of the Secretary and the GB then decided not to recognise the confirmed Working Committee members and the new ones selected by the RA, and chose instead to refer to the members that were dismissed plus three other members that were co-opted by them without any approval by the RA. These actions led to two more court cases at the Madras High Court.

The police complaint

Moreover, a police complaint alleging criminal activities was made by the Office of the Secretary against the three RA-confirmed Working Committee members and three other Aurovilians, and a First Information Report (FIR) was signed by the Deputy Secretary of the Auroville Foundation. The Aurovilians mentioned in the FIR then obtained anticipatory bail to prevent arrest. The criminal case against them is still pending at the District Court in Tindivanam.

Can the Secretary halt the proceedings of the RA?

The first court case initiated at the Madras High Court sought the recognition of the Working Committee selected through the approved RA processes. In August 2022, a judgement was issued quashing the order of the Office of the Secretary preventing the vote and recognizing that all the three authorities of the Auroville Foundation should work in mutuality [*see AVToday # 398 of September 2022*]. The judgment was immediately appealed by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation and an interim stay on this judgement was ordered by a division bench of the Madras High Court that same month.

Since then, the matter has gone through a number of hearings. In September 2023, the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court issued a modification of the interim order affirming that the RA is a statutory body and therefore cannot be interfered with by any external officer, authority or other entity.

The appeal by the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation has now been listed along with residual ATDC matters on June 10th, after the High Court summer break.

Which is the rightful Working Committee?

The second case initiated at the Madras High Court, a *quo warranto* [*‘what is your authority’*] case has been filed by the Working Committee selected by the RA. This writ requests the court to order the group of residents recognised by the Secretary and the Governing Board as the ‘Working Committee’ to prove that they are legitimate and enjoy the confidence of the RA. On March 28th, the judge ordered the RA WCom to submit the list of members in the RA and the list of pending litigations involving Auroville, and ordered the members of the GB-recognised Working Committee and the Secretary to submit the original register of members in the Residents’ Assembly and the official copy of the Participation Working Group document. Both parties were also instructed to file “a joint sequence of dates sans narration to set out the trajectory of events germane to the present matter.” This case is pending.

Admission and Termination of Persons in the Register of Residents Regulations

In December 2023, the Secretary published in the Gazette of India new “Admission and Termination of Persons in the Register of Residents Regulations”. It was made without consultation with the Residents’ Assembly. These Regulations hand power to the Secretary and the GB to determine who lives in Auroville. Immediately after the publication of these new Regulations, the Auroville Foundation Office locked the office of the Auroville Entry Board without any prior notification.

In response, the RA-WCom initiated an Emergency Residents' Assembly decision making process, asserting that the new Regulations are an overreach by the GB and usurp the powers given to the RA as per the Auroville Foundation Act, and that the RA asserts its right to carry out its functions as detailed in the Act. The resolution was overwhelmingly accepted.

continued on page 5



The Madras High Court in Chennai

continued from page 2

In addition, the RA-WCom and an individual Auroville resident petitioned the Madras High Court to stay the new Regulations and declare them *ultra vires* of the Auroville Foundation Act.

On January 23rd, 2024, the Madras High Court ordered an interim stay of the new Regulations. The judges stated that *prima facie*, the impugned regulations erode the powers of the Residents’ Assembly and ordered that, “Until further orders, the admission or termination of the persons in the Register of Residents of the Auroville Foundation shall not be finalized or a person shall be admitted or terminated from the register resorting to the impugned regulations.”

Auroville Foundation (Framework for Selection of Working Committee) Regulations, 2024.

On January 12th, 2024, the Secretary published “the Auroville Foundation (Framework for Selection of Working Committee) Regulations 2024” in part III of the Gazette of India. These Regulations too were made without consulting the Residents’ Assembly.

These Regulations deal with the way the Working Committee of the Residents’ Assembly is to be selected, giving prominent powers to the Governing Board. As these Regulations also appear to be in contravention of the Auroville Foundation Act, the RA-WCom petitioned the Madras High Court to stay them and declare them *ultra vires* of the Auroville Foundation Act, 1988.

On January 23rd, 2024, the Madras High Court, dealing with these Regulations, together with the new Entry and Exit Regulations,

ordered an interim stay, stating that, here too, *prima facie* the impugned regulations erode the powers of the RA. It passed orders that “Until further orders, functioning of the Working Committee under Section 20 of the Act [*the RA-WCom, eds.*] shall not be interfered with by the Committee constituted under the impugned Regulations [*this would be the new GB-WCom, eds.*] and the Working Committee shall be one as constituted under Section 20(3) of the Act.” [*The RA-WCom*]

The cases challenging the Admission and Termination of Residents in the Register of Residents Regulations 2023 and the Selection of the Working Committee Regulations 2024 are pending.

Petitions in High Court on land exchanges

The Madras High Court on 28th March ordered issue of notice to the Auroville Foundation on Writ Petitions and Writ Miscellaneous Petitions filed by an Auroville Resident on 26th March and registered by the Court the same day.

The Writ Petitions pray for court orders to the Auroville Foundation to refrain from “proceeding with any transaction of land transfer, including land exchanges without following the procedures laid down in the Auroville Foundation Rules 1997 and General Financial Rules 2017”, and direct the District Registrar to “cancel the relevant entry of registrations to all land exchanges entered into” by the Auroville Foundation from 2021 till date which have been undertaken without following the said procedures.

The Writ Miscellaneous Petitions pray for the court's Interim Stay Order to the Auroville Foundation from proceeding with any transaction of land transfer without following the above mentioned Foundation and Financial Rules, and direct the Auroville Foundation

to produce before the Court all sale deeds, land deeds and other such instruments of transfer related to the above till the Writ Petition is disposed by the Court.

Other pending cases

There are a number of other cases pending in court between the Auroville Foundation and individuals, mainly regarding land ownership and the veracity of land title deeds. These cases do not involve Auroville working groups or the RA.

More court cases?

In today’s highly polarised atmosphere, it can be expected that the Madras High Court and the Supreme Court of India will be petitioned to issue judgements in other issues as well. As the RA-WCom wrote in the concluding remarks part of its *Observations on the minutes of the Governing Board’s 66th meeting*: “We repeat the concluding remark made in our observations on the minutes of the 63rd, 64th and 65th meetings of the Governing Board: In order to achieve the ‘harmonious collaboration’ mentioned by Shri Soli Sorabjee [*a former Solicitor General of India who had given a legal opinion on the relationship between the GB, RA and IAC, eds.*], we believe that an open interaction between the Board, the International Advisory Council and the Residents’ Assembly will be required. The Board’s authoritarian decisions and the Secretary’s secretive actions do not contribute to Auroville’s well-being and to the realization of the aims for which the Auroville Foundation Act was promulgated, and will only lead to more resentment and to more court cases.”

A bit of history

The earliest mention of Auroville was in the monthly issue of the Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) Information Letter of March 1965, where its General Secretary Navajata wrote: “*You will be glad to know that the Mother has taken up the model township project. She has named it Auroville*”. The township project had been accepted by the Society by a resolution passed its First World Conference, held in August 1964, “*to develop a township near Pondicherry ... for those who want to prepare for a better life.*”

The Mother, initially, showed little interest in the Auroville project, but this changed in 1965. In September that year, the Mother gave her first public message on Auroville. In November 1966, the Government of India endorsed the project and moved a resolution to support of Auroville at the UNESCO General Conference in Paris, which was unanimously accepted. Auroville was inaugurated on 28th February, 1968. More resolutions of support were passed later, in 1968, 1970 and 1983 and once again in 2017.

In 1966, in a conversation with Satprem recorded in Mother’s Agenda, The Mother spoke about why she created Auroville: “*This birth of Auroville wasn’t preceded by any thought; as always, it was simply a Force acting, like a sort of absolute manifesting, and it was so strong that I could have told people, ‘Even if you don’t believe in it, even if all circumstances appear to be quite unfavorable, I KNOW THAT AUROVILLE WILL BE. It may be in a hundred years, it may be in a thousand years, I don’t know, but Auroville will be because it has been decreed.’ So it was decreed – and done quite simply, like that, in obedience to a Command, without any*



Auroville’s inauguration, February 28, 1968. The Ashram delegates, Kiran and Vijay Poddar, approaching the mound leading to the Urn. Kiran is carrying The Mother’s flag, Vijay the stainless steel cylinder containing Auroville’s Charter, handwritten by The Mother, and a bowl with sand from Sri Aurobindo’s Samadhi.

thought.” (21 September 1966). Mother gave the SAS the administrative charge of the project. The SAS did fundraising and purchased lands, many of which were subsequently developed by members of the SAS [*see for example the article Land Purchase in the early years in AVToday # 310, August 2014, eds.*]. After The Mother’s passing in November 1973, a crisis occurred between residents of Auroville and the management of the SAS, which attempted to control Auroville. In 1976, the Government of India appointed a commission headed by the then Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, Shri B.T. Kulkarni, to investigate the dealings of the Sri Aurobindo Society. The commission reported that there were irregularities, after which, in 1980 the Indian Government, headed by Prime

Minister Indira Gandhi, promulgated the Auroville Emergency Provisions Ordinance, which was shortly afterwards followed by Auroville Emergency Provisions Act 1980.

Auroville Emergency Provisions Act 1980

The Act mentions in its preamble that “*The ideals of the project formed India’s highest aspirations, which could not be allowed to be defeated or frustrated. The Sri Aurobindo Society had lost complete control over the situation and the members of Auroville approached the Government of India to give protection against oppression and victimisation at the hands of the said Society. ... There have been instances of law and order situation... serious irregularities in the management of the said Society, misutilisation of its funds and their diversion to other purposes was found.*

The Government in the circumstances could not be a silent spectator to the mismanagement of the project which if not checked could lead to the destruction of the project so nobly conceived.”

The main provisions of the Auroville Emergency Provisions Act were that it vested the management of all undertakings relatable to Auroville in the Government of India for a two-year period (which was later extended by another five years); that it constituted an International Advisory Council to advise the Government, and appointed as its members Mr. M’Bow, the Sec. General of UNESCO; Mrs. Lyudmila Zhivkova, the Minister of Culture, Bulgaria; Shri Narasimha Rao, the Minister of Human Resource Development, Government of India; and Shri J.R.D. Tata, a well-known Indian industrialist. The Act also provided for the appointment of an administrator. A retired judge, Shri L.P. Nigam, was so appointed.

The Supreme Court case

The SAS went to court against the Act, stating that Auroville was a religious institution and that, as per the Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India, mentioning the rights to freedom of religion and to manage religious affairs, the Government cannot interfere in religious institutions. The SAS argued that the Auroville Emergency Provisions Act went against the constitution of India and was therefore invalid. The Supreme Court of India disagreed. In its ruling of November 8th, 1982, it judged that “Shri Aurobindo’s teachings cannot be said to be of a religious nature. Numerous utterings by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother unmistakably show that the Ashram or Society or Auroville is not a religious institution. Aurobindo Society and the Auroville township do not fall within the meaning of religious denomination so as to be violative of Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution.”

Photo courtesy Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives

In April this year, concerned residents of Auroville circulated a petition requesting a halt of the excavation of the Matrimandir Lake to evaluate an alternative design proposal and start an integrated development process. A brief 3-minute video was published on YouTube (https://youtu.be/burl_KPoDS4), and the confidentiality of everybody's signature was guaranteed. The petition highlighted a deep concern about the serious negative environmental impact of a lake of such depth and the effect this will have on the surrounding villages and stated, "We believe that it is possible to fulfill Mother's guidelines for the lake in an environmentally sensitive, humanely inclusive, beautiful, and timely manner." It concludes, "By pausing the ongoing work and considering all options, we can ensure a solution that reflects the values of Auroville and the wishes of the wider community."

The petition was supported by 461 and rejected by 2 people. On April 18th, a group of residents handed over the petition results to the Matrimandir executives.

The Matrimandir executives publicly responded to the petition the next day. They observed that the petition contained fundamental errors regarding the impact of the approved design of the lake on the environment and the water resources of the surrounding villages. The executives also objected to the "bullying and threatening atmosphere" and stated that "it feels absolutely wrong to break the amazing momentum of the on-going work on such a flawed basis", as "lake section 2 has already reached its full length, width and depth and therefore there is no logic in stopping the work without completing the work on this section". They stated that they are working with the lake design approved by Roger Anger, Chief Architect of Auroville appointed by The Mother, which was also followed for the test lake by the previous executive team, and that it is not their role to choose or change the design of the lake. They wrote that donors for the lake are giving their offerings on the basis that the approved design of the lake be followed, and that, if work on the lake would stop, its construction, and maybe even the Matrimandir itself, "will almost certainly be taken out of Aurovillian hands." For these reasons the executives felt unable to halt the lake work. A few days later the Governing Board-appointed Working Committee circulated its appreciation for the response of the Matrimandir Executives. A strongly worded retort was published in the community edition of the News and Notes #1024.

Also in April, a community-initiated alternative design concept for the Matrimandir lake was circulated, proposed by a team of Indian landscape planners and architects. This concept was also made available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moFaD2iJyU>).

Auroville Today interviewed Michael Bonke, Arjun and Rohan to understand what is presently going on at the Matrimandir lake and what their plans for the future are. We also interviewed Suhasini on the alternative design concept for the lake.



The ongoing excavation taken

The progress of the Matrimandir Lake

April 2024. Trucks are driving up and down, day and night, to transport earth dug up from the second section of the lake to a temporary hillock opposite the Town Hall. Auroville Today interviewed Michael Bonke, Arjun and Rohan, who are part of the team, to understand what's going on and what their plans for the future are.

Auroville Today: The development of the lake has run into heavy criticism. How do you respond to that?

Michael: We have seen criticism of the lake for the past 25 years. And many of the arguments against it which were put up 20 or 15 years ago, have been proven wrong by now already. One of the main arguments always was that this project is much too big for Auroville and that we would never be able to pay for it. I remember well, when we had a big meeting with the Town Development Council (TDC) and the then Auroville Secretary 15 years ago, the Matrimandir executives were saying they refuse to talk about the lake unless I would give them a confirmed bank guarantee for the whole cost of the lake. There was always the tendency to either skip the lake project or make the lake smaller, more shallow, less wide etc.

One other argument which is still used today was that the water quality of a lake of 10 meters depth would be very bad, much worse than if the lake would be only 4 meters deep. Two days ago I was scuba diving in the lake and inspected the big pump to fill up the small mini lake on the hill, as well as the underwater foil cushion. I have been diving for 25 years, both in the open sea as also in sweet water lakes. Never have I ever seen a freshwater lake which had such an excellent water quality. The present lake has a depth of 8 meter and at the bottom of it there is still so much light that one could even have an underwater plantation down there. The usual underwater sight in sweet water lakes is maximum 1.5 to 2.5 metres. In the Matrimandir lake you have a visibility of four to five metres! Whoever is criticizing the lake, let him come to the water and see for himself how crystal clear it is.

The fact that we are using granite chip gravel to protect the geo-fabric and foil, is also used as an argument against the lake. The alternative proposal is to use limestone. But in fact the granite chips are one of the reasons why the water is so crystal clear and why we have no excessive algae growth in the lake.

One further argument is that the lake would evaporate too much water. This argument also has been proven wrong. The evaporation is even less than the direct rainfall on the lake. When measuring the evaporation of the lake over the past two years, Jan has monitored that the evaporation of the lake is only three mm per day on average or around 1.2 metres a year. The average rainfall is around 1.3 metres per year. That means that the lake is self-supporting and receives by the direct rainfall on its surface more water than it evaporates. One of the big arguments against the lake always was that it creates a burden for Auroville to maintain its water level, and the evaporation either has to be compensated by groundwater or it depends on the desalination plant, which is not yet there. Now the measurements at the first lake section prove that this is not the case. The water level of the lake neither requires groundwater nor desalinated water to be maintained.

We also observe a strange indifference towards the project of the hill. The hill is a project which is not only a specific part of Mother's vision of Auroville, but which would add essentially to the diversity of Auroville's recreation opportunities. Lakes, hills, forests: all that forms an interesting nature mix. To have the opportunity to go to a nice sunset spot on a hill in the evening and overlook a vast terrain with the sky changing into pink color, is something which I miss very much in Auroville. But nobody seems to be interested in the hill. When Mother drew the hill next to the lake, and when she was speaking about the hill, She was surely not speaking about a little hillock of 10 meters height. She was speaking of a real hill with a fir tree forest covering it! And for a real hill we need a very big quantity of earth! This sets the pace also for the lake. With a 4 meter

deep lake and with the design the so called 'lake task force' proposes, we will not even get a hillock which supersedes the level of the tree-crowns in the hill-area. This constant tendency to miniaturise the Auroville project, is in this case not only miniaturising the lake-hill project, but making it meaningless.

Arjun: Regarding the concern we often hear, that the lake would be filled using groundwater: that's simply incorrect. Till now the lake has been filled with rainwater, both by rainwater that falls on the lake itself and by rainwater runoff from the Matrimandir garden area and from the area outside the Matrimandir lake. I am confident that in future, these will be sufficient to fill up the lake.

Look at the water level in the test lake. It's unbelievable how much rain was collected in a very short period and how much remains in the test lake even now when we are approaching the hottest months of the year. We always wondered if the rainwater would be sufficient to fill up the lake. But two years ago the monsoon was so heavy that the test lake overflowed. According to predictions of the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), this year too we can expect an above-normal rainfall.

What are the plans for the rainwater that is collected in the channels along the Crown Road?

Michael: The original plans were that water collected from the Crown Road runoff would flow to the Darkali pond, and from there would be pumped to a treatment plant and be purified before being released into the Matrimandir Lake. But we are not certain if this is still the concept. Since the remaining portion of the Crown Road will be made by Aurovilians [see article on page 1, eds.] and with a different design, the waterduct on the side of the road is under review and will most probably be used for infrastructure and not for water collection. So the influx of water from the Crown road may not happen.

What is the status of the underwater drinking water storage plans?

Michael: We envisage using HDPE balloons situated inside the Lake to store desalinated water that will come from the future desalination plant. With a 10 meter deep lake, and balloons of 4 to 5 metres high, the volumes of water that can be stored in this way are enormous, and sufficient to cover Auroville's needs in case the aquifers get depleted.

What is the status of the desalination plant?

Michael: Progress has been made obtaining the necessary permissions. We have our environmental clearance, both from Chennai and also from the Forest-Department in Villupuram. It will take some more time before we have the ultimate approval from Delhi and can start building the plant, the inlets and outlets in the sea, and continue laying the pipes that will bring the water up to the Matrimandir. But the most critical part of the application process is behind us.

We see many trucks bringing earth dug up from the second section of the lake to a temporary hillock opposite the Town Hall, located at a place where in future another extension of the lake will need to be dug. Why is this happening and what is so urgent that the work is continuing almost 24/7?

Arjun: The reason for the hurry is that in October and November, the winter monsoon will arrive, and we would like to have the second stretch of the lake ready to receive it. This means that the digging and the HDPE foiling of the lake, and covering it with gravel, will have to be completed by the end of September. The excavation is now more or less finished. We have done the excavation in the form of terraces, and what's left now is to cut off the edges of the terraces and make the correct slopes. Then the foiling will start, followed by the gravel covering and the building of the third retaining wall of lego blocks. Initially, that wall will be four to five metres high. When all that is done, we will start removing blocks from the second wall, the wall between the test lake and the second stretch, and put them on top of the third wall.

What is the need for the second hillock next to the one which was built a few years ago, which now blocks the view of the Matrimandir from the Town Hall?

Michael: There are two reasons. The first is that all the excavated earth, which will be used to build the hill in the Greenbelt which the

Mother envisaged, needs to be brought to the bottom of the excavation to level the bottom of the hill because of the need for putting top soil at the bottom to grow much biomass. The second reason is the earth to the location of the hill.

How do you plan to move the earth to the location of the Greenbelt?

Arjun: By using conveyor belts and the envisaged location. Auroville owns all the land in the area to buy and use a conveyor belt to go down. Conveyor belts are used for kilometers, through forests, at a steep angle so as to be efficient. If two, there will be no more problems.

But all the lands to create the hill are already with us.

Arjun: Yes. And until the hill is built, the lake may not be possible. The excavated earth. But we have the lands for the hill area with us. We are already with us.

How do you plan to stabilize the earth from sliding down during the pour of heavy rains?

Arjun: That's a legitimate concern. We built the first hillock and we have seen a landslip could very well happen.

Michael: We plan to build a Matrimandir fence between the administrative area (the Town Hall) and the Auroville Archives) towards the lake. Space for the hillock to be built. In the future, a green space will be created and the administrative area will be moved until the hillock has been built. Otherwise we would only have a fence.

We have been told that the lake will be dug at a lower level than the current one.

Arjun: That's correct. The lake will be dug below the lake level. But we will have a very soft slope.

What about those people who are already living there?

Michael: There is no problem. We will come, will attract more people to live there daily. We cannot allow people to visit the inner gardens. We will move the outer edge of the lake. There will be parks there which can help.

Have you given any thought to the aesthetic aspects?

Arjun: Of course. We will have a beautiful, and we would surely have a beautiful walkway along the lake, with shade, and make the lake more beautiful now will then be under construction is not finished with the preliminary landscaping, a small lake like. Mother said that the lake is the most beautiful place on earth. We will have a vision.



The new Matrimandir hillock seen from the Town Hall. The fence and the road in front will be moved towards the administrative area.



on of the second lake stretch. Photo
on April 23rd, 2024.

Lake

of the Matrimandir lake to a are working in the lake

s to be stored temporarily as the earth from the
, which will be dug up last, has to be put at the
it's more solid. If you do it the other way round,
om, the hill would be unstable as top soil has too
and reason is that we are not yet ready to bring all
f the hill in the Greenbelt.

the earth from the two hillocks to the hill in

veyor belts. The distance between the hillocks
ion of the hill is about two kilometres and
ad over which such a belt would run. It is cheap-
veyor belt than to have trucks running up and
e not noisy or polluting. A conveyor belt can go
rested areas, over or under roads, and can be put
bring earth to the top of the hill. After a year or
e hillocks.

the that hill have still to be purchased?

l that is done, the excavation of more sections of
sible as long as we have no place to store the
hope that the jigsaw puzzle of purchasing the
be resolved soon. Most of the lands for the hill

*lize this second temporary hillock and prevent
on the nearby road if there is a sudden down-*

imate concern. We had this problem when we
ve had to do a lot of work to keep the road clear.
ll happen.

o move the road, which is going along the
en the hillock and the buildings in the adminis-
-hall, the Auroville Foundation Office, and the
rds the administrative area. That will give more
e flattened and prevent a possible landslide. In
be created in the area between the lake shore
a. But we will wait with planting any trees there
n removed and that section of the lake is dug.
y risk damaging the trees.

*the buildings in the Administrative Area are sit-
n the lake level.*

The floor level of the Town Hall is 1.30 metres
that doesn't matter. There will be an embank-
towards the Administrative Area buildings.

visiting the Matrimandir and its gardens?

o doubt that the Matrimandir, in the years to
d more people, perhaps even thousands of peo-
w all of them to come into the Matrimandir itself
So they will most likely want to walk along the
erefore, we will also need to create some shaded
ld these people.

ught to the contouring of the Lake, to its aes-

hat we have at present is functional, not beauti-
not leave it the way it is. We want to create a
the outer edge of the Lake, with trees providing
edges very beautiful. The gravel which one sees
water and no longer visible. As long as the con-
e cannot do too much. Perhaps we can do a pre-
ection to give people an idea of what it can be
Matrimandir and its gardens and lake will be the
earth. We'll do everything we can to realize that

In conversation with Alan and Carel

An alternative lake design concept

Recently, as there was widespread concern about what was happening with the Matrimandir lake excavation, a task force was created at a General Meeting to prepare a design brief that would frame the aesthetic, environmental, functional and technical parameters to undertake the preparation of an alternative concept design. It would be for an aesthetic, living water body with aquatic flora and fauna, with an undulating shoreline and shading trees; it would be rain-fed, capturing the run-off from the outer gardens and the city, and it would be integrated into the natural topography of the area, with the minimum depth needed for a natural balanced freshwater habitat.

The task force consulted Mr. Mohan Rao, a critically acclaimed Indian landscape planner and architect, to ask him if it was possible to make a lake with such a brief. He prepared a preliminary design concept that demonstrates it is not only possible but it can be beautiful, too. The design was presented recently to the community in a five minutes video.

Auroville Today asked a member of the task force, Suhasini, to tell us more about the background and why an alternative concept is necessary.

Why is there a need for an alternative design for the lake?

The Matrimandir lake is situated on top of a plateau that impacts three watersheds carved out over millions of years. So when you interfere with a watershed, which the present design would do by creating an inverted dam of 100 metres width and 10 metres deep, you need to be very sure about what you are doing and its possible consequences, not just for Auroville but also the wider region.

The Mother's vision calls for a lake around Matrimandir and its gardens. About decade or so ago while walking round the Matrimandir gardens with Mohan Rao, a landscape planner specialized in watershed planning, I asked him about the feasibility of a lake around the Matrimandir, sitting on top of three watersheds, and he said it was possible, but one had to be creative. He also pointed out that often around or near religious structure in India there is a water body, as water is an interface between spirit and matter.

In 2013, Aurovilian Gilles Boulicot published a report "A study exploring a multi-sourcing approach for Auroville with the integration of Matrimandir Lake." This study was commissioned by the Auroville Town Development Council. I thought this study held the key to the possibility of doing a water body around the Matrimandir that would be the least intrusive way to fulfill the vision. A few years before that, Michael Bonke's team had started to work on six mini test ponds to ascertain the best sealant, evaporation parameters and construction methodology. And I imagined these studies would be complementary.

But the study made by Gilles was never discussed or considered by the team working with Micheal Bonke, and this was a huge loss. Meanwhile, Michael's team decided to undertake implementation of a test lake of approximately 125 x 100 m in size and a depth of 10 m.

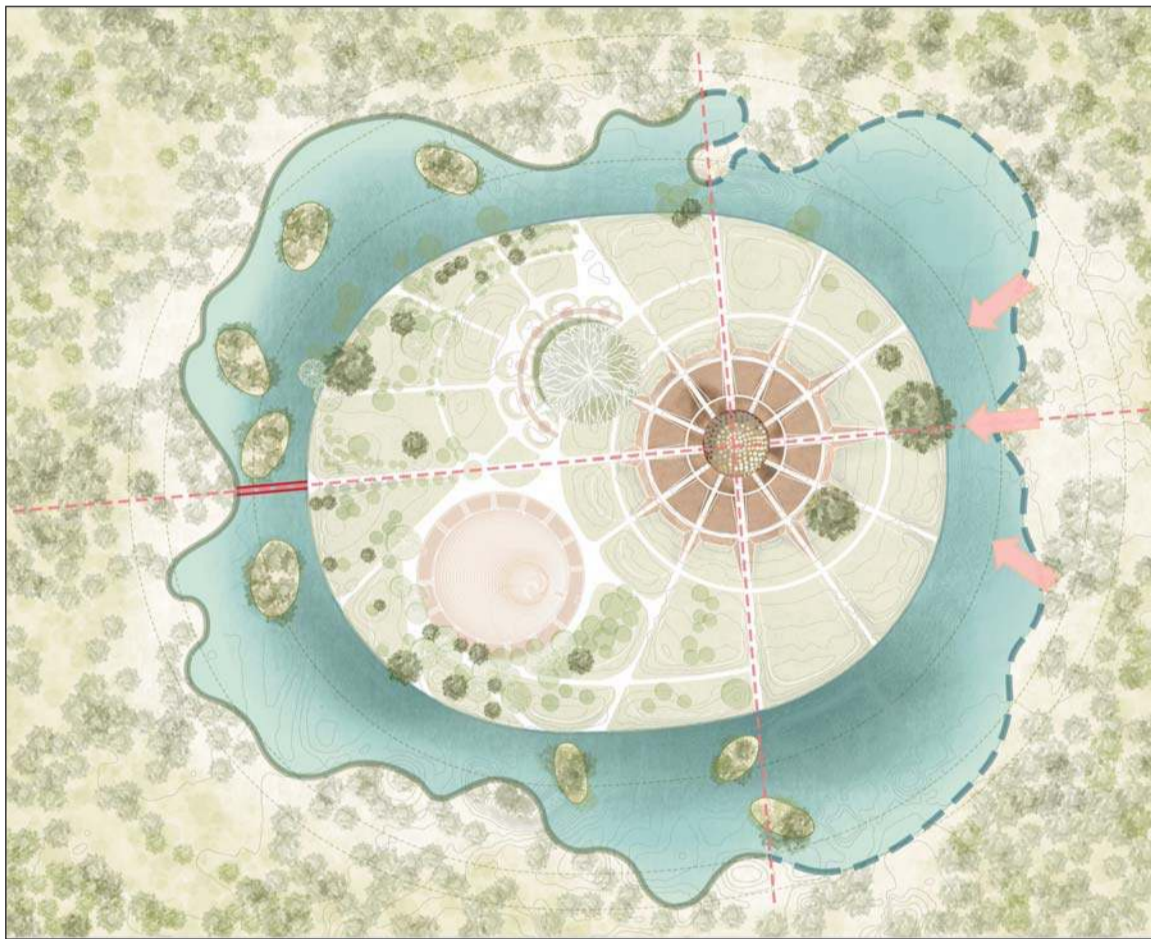
I was sitting on the sidelines and observing all this. Suddenly, last year Michael's team commenced a rapid ground clearing around the Matrimandir gardens, cutting the large trees indiscriminately. This action was traumatic for the residents given the recent history with the Crown Road development. Who in this day and age cuts down trees on top of a watershed? Is it not possible to develop Auroville without destruction? Why are we adopting the conventional mode of development by destruction?

But, still, I didn't get involved. However, when I went to Michael's second presentation, I realized that here was somebody who lacked the capacity to comprehend the complexity of the project but as he was the channel for the finance, he appointed himself as the client, project manager and techno-feasibility expert. Moreover, he was also setting the timeline for the implementation.

This is what most developers do as they see development projects as financial investment: the faster the development is done, the lower the cost of investment considering inflation and interest rates. But with infrastructure, commercial, institutional or residential development projects, there are precedents that allow a developer to assess risks from unforeseen events and account for it. But in our case, we don't have any case studies or a precedent. Is there a lake on a hill anywhere in peninsular India? Is there any geological

study of an island with a completely sealed moat around on top of a hill? Any data on how water that cannot percolate or diffuse laterally because of a sealed moat will impact structures due to water logging?

I felt it is our responsibility to tap the knowledge pool we have in Auroville and evaluate the risks involved. So, after his second presentation, a few of us met with Michael. I had prepared a short note from the six mini test ponds and the annexure to the site application made for the test lake to gather information on the data collected and analysis. It was in this meeting we got to know that, out of the ten parameters that they had listed in their site permission proposal, only four were investigated, all of them pertaining to the HDPE



Proposal by Mohan Rao, based on The Mother's description of the Matrimandir lake, with maximum four meters depth and natural seasonal variations.

sheets as sealant. No data has been collected on the lake stratification (temperatures at various depths), water quality, sedimentation and more. When we suggested that this should be done before going forward with excavation, Michael dismissed the need for more data as he had employed experts in Germany and they were of the same opinion as him. The fact that both his German experts and Harald Kraft's experience with constructing water bodies is primarily in temperate zones, was not important.

We admitted we were not experts; to get out of the impasse we proposed a third party evaluation with independent experts, one with a background in tropical climate appointed by us and an expert appointed by him and together they select a third expert. The three would study and evaluate the lake design including the size, depth and water quality and give us their recommendations. I thought this was a very reasonable proposal, and it wouldn't need to take long, but Michael was furious and accused us of having blocked the development of the lake for many years.

I'm not questioning the vision; I'm questioning our capacity to make decisions that will impact not only Auroville, but also the bioregion. When people are overwhelmed by complexities of systems and processes beyond their capacity, the tendency is to fall back on received wisdom and belief systems. And invariably the consequences are disastrous. So many unconscious acts have led to irreversible damage to entire communities and ecosystems.

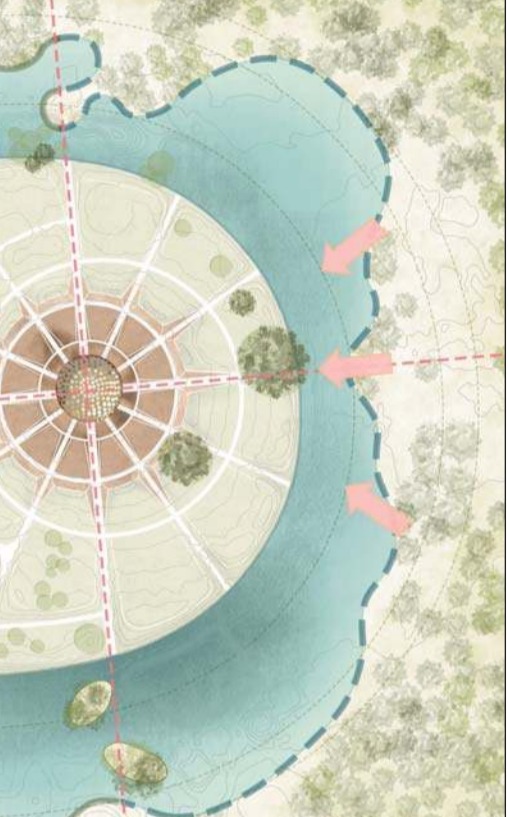
But Michael's team would say they are looking at the future because they are creating a reservoir to provide water to the township in an emergency.

The lake must be 10 meters deep to accommodate the submerged HDPE balloons filled with potable water holding one month's supply of water for the township of Auroville. This is looking at the future? Let us unpack this claim. Considering that most of the area is dependent on ground water, failure of this resource will be due to over exploitation, leading to salinity due to sea water intrusion. In such a case, having a one-month buffer is supposed to be sufficient time to find and tap into another source? And as Michael has promised that no ground water will be used either to fill the lake or the balloons, he is assuming a desalination plant will be up and running

shortly. In that case, why pump the desalinated water into the balloons, wait a month till they have been emptied and then connect to the desalinated water pipe to distribution network to supply the city of Auroville?

Their other justification for the depth, apart from more efficient evaporative loss, is that it's required for water quality.

Was regular water quality testing done in the test lake and compared with water from ponds of four meters or less deep to show that the deeper water body had better water quality? Similarly, was the evaporative loss monitored in the test lake and compared with



the standard published data for evaporation in the zone? If not, what is the basis of the justification?

Michael said that a current would ensure that a dead, de-oxygenated zone would not exist at the bottom because the water would be continually re-circulated.

Temperature and density are inversely proportionate, which means that warm water will remain on the top and colder below. What will cause a current to reverse this? A breeze will ripple the surface water, move it forward till it reaches a barrier where it will break. But energy released by breaking of these ripples or waves is insufficient to push the warm water down to churn up the colder water.

If you take the ocean currents like the Gulf Stream, the warm water is pulled towards the north pole to replace the sinking freezing waters in the arctic circle. So, unless we also create a system of freezing water to sink to the bottom, the warm water is going to stay where it is.

As I see it, the majority of the community agrees on very simple criteria for the lake. It needs to be a living water body, which means incorporating aquatic flora and fauna that will have a self-regulating capacity to fix oxygen and break down the organic matter. And the lake should be rain-fed; and the shoreline landscaped to tolerate the seasonal level fluctuation. Just these three basic criteria. If, over and above that, it provides water for the Matrimandir gardens and supplies water to the city, that would be great! But not at the cost of these three basic criteria.

The Matrimandir Task Force was formed to come up with a design brief based on parameters that elaborates these three criteria. And the alternative concept design presented by Mohan Rao based on this brief is a concept and a direction. It will need to be elaborated. But all we wanted at this point was to know that it is possible, and it seems it is.

As there is a lack of supporting data in the public domain for technical claims made by Michael and his team, the only way forward is a third party independent review of their design and techno-feasibility study by experts. And if his technical experts have the proof of concept, they should be more than pleased to have it peer reviewed.

From an interview by Alan

La Boutique d'Auroville closed down

After more than 50 years, La Boutique d'Auroville in Pondicherry has closed down.

On April 1st, 2024, the Auroville Boutique in Pondicherry closed its operations. More than 50 years ago – the exact date is lost in history – it was started by the visionary André Tardeil who felt that an Auroville outlet cum information office in Pondicherry was necessary. He rented a prime location in Nehru Street, convinced Auroville units to put their products there and managed the shop for a few years. He had many successors, including the French Aurovilians Ananda and Subhir. But it is Bhoomi (J. Dharma) who, for the last 36 years, commuted daily to run the shop. “I didn’t mind the driving,” he shrugs, “even though in recent years traffic was much more intense.”

Apart from selling products from Auroville such as garments, handicrafts, postcards, books and magazines (including Auroville Today), the

managers also gave information on how to visit Auroville and what to do there. “The internet didn’t change that aspect all that much,” says Bhoomi. “We continued receiving many people who evidently are not familiar with using the net. I enjoyed that part of the work more than selling Auroville products.”

One year ago he was served notice to vacate the shop, as the building had been sold. “We managed to get a one-year respite, but by the end of this month, we’re out” he says. Other shop outlets are not easily available. Bhoomi has been running around evaluating possible locations and offers, but balks at the asking rent of often more than Rs 150,000 a month with a 10 months advance. “That’s double of what we paid here,” he says. “Moreover, we don’t have that much in reserves after we paid the staff layoff settlements.”

His preference is for another location in the White Town of Pondicherry, the area bordering the sea where French colonists once lived. “As Auroville products can carry a premium price because of the excellence of the brand name ‘Auroville’, we would be able to afford a place there,” he says. “Moreover, Pondicherry has become a popular tourist destination for weekend visitors from Bangalore and Chennai. The shops all benefit.”

Is such a prime location available? “I have hope,” says Bhoomi. “A person connected to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram told me that he may get us a suitable location by December this year. That would be fantastic, even though it would take some time for us to be up and running again. Meanwhile, I continue searching.” And the rent and advance payment required? “We’ll need to get a loan, preferably an ‘angel loan,’” he says. “Otherwise it will not be possible.” He mentions that the Boutique once got such a loan from Ananda, when, due to



Covid, nothing could be sold, yet the landlord insisted on being paid. “Ananda told us that we could repay the loan when we were able to. It was a great gift. Luckily, after Covid there was a sales upsurge, so we could repay pretty soon.”

Asked what his immediate plans are, Bhoomi says he is thinking of taking a few months’ holiday – his first in more than 30 years.

Carel

Bhoomi, 59, was born in Kulapalayam and was one of the first students of the early Auroville schools. He married Valarmathy, who works as a nurse in the Auroville Health Centre in Aspiration. The couple has two sons: one studies dentistry, the other medicine. Both hope to rejoin Auroville after getting their degrees.

GAMES

The Making of BloomO! – The soulful flower card game

BloomO! was launched during a warm and dynamically engaging event in Auroville as part of the Auroville week in February 2024, followed by a launch in Pondicherry. The game, created by Jyoti Khare (watercolour illustrations) and Chetana Deorah (design), helps discover the spiritual significance of flowers, through memory, observation, and reflexes with the art of attention. It invites you to go deeper with reflective insight, based on the messages and significance for each of the eighty flower cards.

Jyoti grew up in the Ashram school and has been an artist, educator and dancer amongst many creative pursuits. She has written and illustrated many children’s visual story books. Currently she is a teacher at Nandanam School in Auroville and continues to experiment and explore her sadhana by painting.

Chetana grew up in Mumbai and has a Bachelors in Science and a Masters in Graphic Design from San Francisco, USA. Her professional career has been in leading teams delivering User-Experience Design and she is also a graphic designer and aspiring artist. Her master’s thesis was on the visual interpretation of three of Sri Aurobindo’s poems. She is currently based in Auroville.

The Flowers brought us together

Chetana recalls that it was in September 2022 when she met Jyoti at La Terrace in Auroville after many people had mentioned it would be a good idea for them to connect. This first conversation between an artist and a designer went on for over two hours. They discussed print production details for the book *Flowers: A Joyful Companion To The Soul*, a 177-page full-colour book depicting 80 of Jyoti’s exquisitely detailed, watercolour paintings of flowers, with the spiritual names and significance given by The Mother (launched on August 15, 2022).

This project was inspired by Tara Jauhar, who lived in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram for many years. In her book *Growing Up With The Mother* she captured myriad magical moments and interactions with The Mother, one of which was focused on Mother’s love for games of skill, one of which was a game of skill based on flowers called *The Game of Flowers* (1940).

Tara recalled “She brought us *The Game of Flowers*, in which She took great interest. The game was played with two sets of cards. One set was the picture of the flower and its spiritual significance. It also had the botanical and common name written underneath, but this had no importance for the game. The second set of cards was smaller in size and carried only the spiritual name

of the flowers. The small cards were placed in one heap in the centre face down. The picture cards were distributed equally among the players. Each player in turn would pick a card from the centre heap and whoever had the corresponding picture card, would take it out from his collection and put it down in the centre. The one who finished all the cards first would be the winner.



“To start with, The Mother gave us about 20 cards in which the pictures of the flowers had been pasted or painted. Below, in Her own hand, was written the significance. A few days later She added more cards. All the artists of the Ashram were asked to paint new flowers, which kept adding to our collection. These paintings had to be done according to the dimensions of our cards. At the end of a few months we had almost 500 cards. When these were distributed to the players, each of us had more than 80 cards in our hands. Playing with them regularly, we learnt to tell the significance of each flower easily. Through this game The Mother taught us to love flowers and understand them.”

The Art of BloomO!

Jyoti’s love for poetry and Sri Aurobindo’s letters to aspiring poet disciples have permeated her attitude toward the art she creates: “For me, art has always been a thirst for beauty. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have said that it is the material manifestation of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo encouraged this approach to art, as it is a similar movement of opening that is required for the Sadhana.”

When Jyoti was asked to take on this project, she immediately said ‘yes’ given the joy of

creating something The Mother had worked on. Then the question arose as to why flower paintings are needed when one could get a photo of them. This self-inquiry led her to approach the project as an opportunity to be true to the character of each flower and yet be creative, bringing forth the atmosphere, the spiritual essence, of what each flower stands for, described by The Mother. She selected 80 flowers to paint and the initial flower book was organised by flowers in three spiritual themes: Divine Love, Individual Sadhana, Collective Sadhana.

The Design of BloomO!

The start of Chetana’s design process was inspired by John Cage’s philosophy, which revolves around the value of the questions asked during the process. The focus is on the exploration of questions rather than just finding answers. This fosters curiosity, experimentation and innovation, leading to original and meaningful solutions.

This principle resonates strongly in the journey of BloomO!’s design for Chetana. While working on her thesis during her Masters design programme, she came across this anonymous quote on design and ever since it has been a guiding force for most of her work and role as a designer.



“Design is a verb. It is the process of active discovery, investigation, analysis, order, insight and creation. From scattered data comes information, from subjective opinion emerges a focused idea.” This process ultimately shaped BloomO!’s design with a clear focus on user needs.

Usability studies were conducted for game play, incorporating feedback from children, adults and solo play sessions, to refine the user experience.

An inner journey

The process of coming up with cards and drawing them felt like an inner journey. “Along with painting the flower itself,” says Jyoti, “the aspiration to express something of the vibration and atmosphere of its significance through the painting was what made the journey with the project challenging and meaningful. This required me to go within, to connect to the flower, and at the same time open up to what was deeply alive in me and receive guidance from The Mother. Had I chosen to do a merely botanical work, I could have still done it as an offering, but I may have missed out on opening up to inspiration and guidance for a deeper expression of the work. How much I succeeded I don’t know, but journeying with it is what mattered to me”.

Chetana pointed out that her role complemented Jyoti’s, ensuring the product experience was both usable and environmentally responsible, with a strong aesthetic. “Throughout the process, we collaborated closely, paying meticulous attention to detail, particularly during print production. The journey of making BloomO! was passionate, involving both giving and letting go, and invoking The Mother’s eye for beauty and grace.

So has their relationship with flowers evolved since then? Chetana gained insights from Jyoti’s artistic interpretation of the spiritual messages of each flower, particularly Aditi and its twelve attributes. “BloomO! has deepened my appreciation for the aesthetic and spiritual aspects of flowers after what was a botanical curiosity since childhood (I would dissect flowers and make collages). I frequently use the cards for guidance or reflection as a start to the day, and playing as a group continues to spark enriching conversations and collective energy.”

Jyoti said that though she knew that The Mother has given spiritual significance to the flowers, she had not plunged into them as deeply yet. Connecting to them more closely, to their significance and The Mother’s comment for each flower, she realised that one can do Her Yoga just by journeying with the flowers and opening oneself to them - a Yoga through beauty. “Lately I have been playing this game in different circles, with both children and adults, and I’m always touched to see how deeply people relate to it and how much they enjoy it. It is really The Mother’s game, inspired by what She had created, and everyone receives Her blessings through it.”

Chetana and Chandra

The game is available for purchase online at www.auroville.com and at local retail outlets in Auroville and Pondicherry.

Elevating the lowly

David Blamey is an established London-based artist who works in the western tradition of post-minimal and conceptual art. His multidisciplinary practice includes a film, sound, exhibitions and the independent publishing imprint *Open Editions*. His exhibition *The Long Now* is the outcome of an artist residency awarded by Centre d'Art Auroville, undertaken in February and March 2024.

Auroville Today: *The media release for your exhibition mentioned the four different roles you've taken up in Auroville during the making of these art works: visitor, passerby, occasional participant, observer, friend. Can you elaborate on the intersection of those, and how it plays into your work?*

I'd visited Auroville twice before and found the project super interesting – almost idyllic – and so the civil war arising from the current situation caught me completely off-guard. This is the reason why I felt it important to be candid about my position as an outsider during this unprecedented period of turbulence and change. I don't have any skin in the game and I certainly don't have any propaganda that could be imparted in the work I've made. What I have done is try to make a show that dissolves some boundaries as I saw them: physical, cultural and international. As a neutral observer all I can do is remix and represent elements of the world as I see them. The objective was to seduce you into slowing down to tune into what I see, while being honest about my transient point of view.

How did the environment and atmosphere of Auroville influence your creative process and the concepts explored in the exhibition?

I can give you a direct environmental example. I've been observing the troupe of ladies employed to clean our building every day. They are a powerful presence, believe me. One morning I noticed that they have a habit of laying out wet towels to dry in the sun. A green cloth had been left on the floor of my hallway and a leaf had fallen next to it.



PHOTO: DAVID BLAMEY

Going and Coming



PHOTO: MARCO SAROLDI

Love Trails

Their colours were similar, but not identical. The acid green of the rag was in some kind of correspondence with the new shoot green of the leaf and the charge of energy vibrating between them sparked feelings of the joy of life. I thought to myself, "Oh my god, I've never seen green this way before". This set me on the path of trying to juxtapose painted coloured cloth with similar colours found in nature to harness that same energy. Maybe this process of working could be described as probing the difference between 'looking' and 'seeing'. All the work in this show is of subjects that you have looked at already, but maybe never seen before.

One artwork consists of many cheap necklaces strung together on the floor. Is this an effort to give a different context to mundane items?

Yes, absolutely. Materiality is really important, and art, to me, resides in the possibility of transforming something materially inferior into an idea that we can begin to consider as significant.

All the beads were bought from a seller who approached me on a beach. They are displayed in a circuitous line which is similar to trails made in the sand by sea snails, as were evident on the same beach. These kinds of necklaces are worn by many in Auroville and by countless travellers that I've met in India over the years. As a simple statement about identity, 'love beads' carry a great deal of transcultural meaning and signify some sort of tenuous meeting point between east and west. I really wanted to make a piece of work that speaks about the presence of Europeans in Auroville and our attempt to assimilate the Indian context that we've impressed ourselves upon.

You've spent a lot of time in India and you use ethnographic methods – which is not so common in conceptual art. Can you talk about how you use those methods in the work you create in India?

I did an ethnographic research methods course at SOAS University London recently and you know what: you could have replaced every appearance of the word 'anthropology' with the word 'art' and the texts would have remained instructive to art students. We have so much in common and yet so much to learn from one another.

The most obvious method that I use stemming from anthropology is fieldwork. What this conventionally means is that you turn up somewhere you believe holds the capacity to generate good data and you observe your subject. Some researchers do this in a very disciplined way by conducting surveys or asking the same questions over and over, but the most innovative anthropology always seems to come from the rule-breakers. I don't have any 'informants' as such, since I study subjects such as faded flags, mosquito coils, tide lines, the sky and stationary shop windows. It has been a revelation that my work has found an audience in the world of visual anthropology. My film *Rice* has been screened at as many ethnographic movie festivals as art galleries.

You mentioned that you consider the 'takeaway' for viewers. What do you think they will take away from *The Long Now*?

Clearly the exhibition has posed a challenge in some quarters. I feel that a proportion of people have interpreted my work as a threat to the way that things are usually done, while others have embraced it as an opportunity to change. That's OK. I accept that I'm on a narrow path – all things considered.

I've been conducting research in recent years into what I've framed as the 'perfect moment' in art. Not making it, but viewing it – I hasten to add. Artists hardly ever talk about how they hope their audience will feel looking at their work, but this has become something of a preoccupation for me. I always gauge the success of an exhibited work by the measure of its capacity to induce feeling, but I don't mind if my work takes your mind somewhere else completely, like music can do. If you consider the act of looking at art as something like the ritual of darshan, for example, then a triangle of unity emerges that makes obvious the interconnection between the moment of creative inspiration, the act of making, and experience of beholding. Understanding that this circuit exists has enabled me to work much more freely. I no longer feel any responsibility to communicate in graphic terms.

You incorporated Sri Aurobindo's quote "All Life is Yoga" into your exhibition description. How does this connect to the exhibition's title 'The Long Now' and its emphasis on living in the present moment?

Many of the starting points for works in this show were fleeting moments of clarity that I've learned to recognise by lowering my desire; so the title borrows an idea from mindfulness, of being in the moment and trying to sustain it. I've just equated that to the process of making art. Maybe The Mother's quote, "Work done in the true spirit is meditation." would have been equally apt. Most artists will tell you that the 'zone' I identified just now is a meditative space. You have to let go of your ambition before the proper work can start.



PHOTO: MARCO SAROLDI

David Blamey at work

You've read and incorporated Zen Buddhism and Vedanta notions into your work in the past. And since being here, I believe you've considered Sri Aurobindo's conceptions of yoga?

From what I've read [of Sri Aurobindo] so far, I'm beginning to understand something of his theory of spiritual evolution and it seems exactly like the sign of hope that the planet needs right now. Parts of this philosophy could actually be the magic bullet for so many of the problems that humanity is facing today. But I do wonder how much discussion takes place between environmentalists, biologists, physicists, economists, artists and philosophers from the rest of the world and those at the helm of the Aurovilian project currently? There would surely be huge potential in testing the wisdom you've generated here in partnership with other esoteric knowledge producers from different cultural spheres.

How can your exhibition, and art in Auroville more generally, connect to, or have impact, globally?

My exhibition? Very little, I'd have thought, as the situation stands. Some aspects of Auroville's impact 'globally', as you put it, seem open to accusations of elitism and introspection. The optics aren't so good currently.

But Auroville does seem uniquely situated to take a position at the forefront of spirituality explored through art. I can't immediately think of any contemporary gallery, research initiative, or museum doing this kind of work. You could have such a centre of excellence right here.

A more ambitious idea of art in Auroville could generate a new sense of relevance and purpose. Imagine an ongoing programme of exhibitions at the heart of the Visitors' Centre that presented a seriously curated enquiry into the spiritual in art globally – from paganism, through outsider and tribal art to mysticism, abstraction and trance. I think this would galvanise your mission, not undermine it.

In conversation with Lesley

EDUCATION

STEAM Fest celebrates fusion of literature and learning

The annual STEAM Fest organised by Yuvabe Education at Deepanam School in Auroville was held on 6th April 2024. Once again the fest captured the imagination of students and families alike. This year's theme, "Explore the Magic: Where Literature Meets Learning," brought together the worlds of storytelling and science in a celebration of creativity and innovation.



Children presenting their projects

The STEAM Fest showcased a diverse range of projects and activities designed to inspire curiosity and promote interdisciplinary learning, each having something for everyone.

For example, one of the projects was titled "Bharata's devotion - Crack the signal".

Bharata's search for Rama sparked a discussion on modern communication systems, including Morse Code. To explore this further, the children were engaged in constructing buzzer circuits



Visitors playing Circuit game

and conducted games encoding and decoding words and phrases using Morse Code. Through this hands-on activity, children gained practical experience in understanding Morse Code and its application in communication systems. They developed problem-solving skills and critical thinking while having fun decoding messages, enhancing their understanding of the role of technology in communication.

In its third year, the Annual STEAM Fest at Deepanam School not only provides a platform for students to

explore and innovate but fosters a spirit of collaboration and community participation as well. As Auroville continues to champion holistic education, we hope events like these serve as beacons of inspiration for the next generation of thinkers and creators.

Yuvabe Education/ Deepanam School



Visitors playing memory game

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY YUVABE / DEEPANAM

Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu states his support for Auroville
Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Mr. M. K. Stalin has promised in the Puducherry election campaign that “Auroville, an international city caught in the grip of RSS, will be implemented according to the dream of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.”

Local politician alleges mismanagement by Auroville Foundation
On April 3rd, 2024, Shri M. Chakrapani, a member of the Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu representing the Vanur constituency of the Villupuram district, sent a widely circulated letter to the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation alleging Auroville mismanagement over the last two years. Mentioning that he represents more than 100 villages, the majority of which rely on Auroville as a source of livelihood, he stated that Auroville's continued development and sustainability is a matter of great pride for all of them. He criticised Auroville's current governance, in particular in removing local Aurovilian Tamils from working groups and replacing them by other Tamil appointees which, at best, he wrote, is “a tokenistic formality”. Among other things, he objected to the harassment of Aurovilian Tamils who have taken issue with recent decisions; expressed concern about barriers being imposed on visa renewal of foreigners; and expressed his disapproval that a significant number of local Tamil workers involved in key Auroville industries and activities have been dismissed without adequate justification, little notice period and without sufficient compensation. Mr. Chakrapani also mentioned that he had received numerous complaints concerning possible corruption in cases involving land purchases. Mr. Chakrapani concluded his letter stating that he fears that if the alleged malpractices, such as the abuse of power, corruption, and harassment of Tamil Auroville residents and foreigners, are not remedied soon, the tide may turn and that the Secretary may lose the goodwill and support of the villages and the population of Auroville, resulting in increased public protest against the current administration.

Request to restore community budgets and maintenances
On April 9th the Working Committee of the Residents' Assembly (RA-WCom) sent an email to the Budget Coordination Committee (BCC) demanding that the BCC restore access to the budgets and Financial Service accounts of the working groups and services that have been selected or appointed by the Residents' Assembly (RA), and to ensure that the maintenances of the RA members and Services are restored through the Auroville City Services Budget. Reference was made to the recent court orders confirming the role of the RA and its Working Committee in carrying out functions as stipulated in the Auroville Foundation Act 1988. The working groups and services are the RA-WCom, the RA-WCom Resource Persons, the RA Service (RAS), the Entry Board (aka Admissions Committee), the Auroville Council and the Town Planning and Development Council.

Request to hand over Auroville.org.in domain
By letter dated April 9, 2024, the RA-WCom requested the Secretary of the Auroville Foundation to hand over the management and credentials of the domain auroville.org.in and its associated Google workspace to the RA-WCom, which both were set up by members of the Residents' Assembly to enable the Residents' Assembly to fulfil its duties of day-to-day management of Auroville. The RA-WCom stated that it has faced challenges in communicating with all residents of Auroville following the forceful takeover of the domain auroville.org.in. The Secretary was also requested to provide access and passwords of the email IDs workingcom@auroville.org.in and wcoffice@auroville.org.in and of other RA groups and services, and also to prevent the illegal use of those IDs by any other parties. Lastly, it requested that all blocks preventing the uninter-

rupted and timely communications between auroville.org.in email IDs and non auroville.org.in e-mails be removed.

Decisions of GB-FAMC not recognized
The RA-Working Committee and the RA-Town Development Committee sent a joint note to the community advising to disregard notices sent by the GB-FAMC with the request to vacate at the earliest the Auroville assets they are stewarding to make way for roads or 'lines of force'. The members of these working groups observed that it is not in the direct purview of the GB-FAMC to take on matters of planning and development and that the ATDC constituted by the GB under Section 16 of the Auroville Foundation (AVF) Act, which had been directing such work, has been declared invalid by the Madras High Court judgment of 15th March 2024. The two working groups do not recognise the decisions taken by the GB-FAMC or by the GB-ATDC.

Censorship of News & Notes
The Auroville Council reminded the community that in December 2022, following instructions from the Auroville Foundation Office (AVFO), the Auroville News & Notes (N&N) began censoring the content received from a portion of the Residents' Assembly. Attempts to convince the N&N managers to continue publishing the announcements of the working groups selected by the RA were ignored, which led the Auroville Council to officially dismiss the managers and replace them with a new team. However, the old managers ignored their dismissal and continued publishing their censored newsletter, receiving funds to do so from the BCC approved by the AVFO. To solve the problem a second Auroville News & Notes called the "RA edition" is now being published, which publishes all announcements that are submitted regardless of the submitter's position on the current conflict. The Council wrote that this transition to the RA edition “has not been easy with no financial support from the Central Fund and with the need for secrecy so as not to attract unwanted reprisal for the people involved.” Today, the RA News & Notes is sent to more than 3000 people weekly and is also printed and distributed to most public places. The Council, having noticed that many residents continue to send their announcements to the censored newsletter – often without awareness that there are now two versions of News & Notes – has invited residents to send their content to the RA edition of the News & Notes (newsandnotes@auroville.services) and not to legitimise the censored newsletter.

General meeting on TDC regulations
The RA-WCom has invited residents for a General Meeting in Kalabhumii on April 30th, regarding formulating draft regulations about the constitution and function of the Town Development Council (TDC). The RA-WCom wrote that, following the Madras High Court judgement of March 15th, a new TDC can be constituted only after new regulations are made, approved by the Governing Board and published in the Gazette of India. The former RA TDC, in consultation with the Working Committee, have taken the initiative to draft a preliminary set of regulations to be presented to the GB for its approval.

TLC closed
On April 17th, the SAIER board informed TLC (The Learning Community) that SAIER has decided to withdraw all financial support for TLC (facilitators' maintenances and running budget), to reclaim all assets accumulated over the years, and that the TLC Base Camp has to be vacated by July 2024. TLC has been functioning for 16 years. SAIER stated that it is responsible for ensuring that its sub-units align with and work toward the ideals of Auroville; that they serve the current and evolving needs of the community; and that their use of collective resources is reasonable and fair in the context of an overall shared economy. “Since the school split, seven years ago, the

enrolment of Auroville children in TLC has been decreasing, in the case of both new students and continuing students. We have reviewed the data of not only the number of students, but also how long they stayed before moving to other schools and in some cases moving out of Auroville. SAIER has supported TLC over the years in the hope this trend will change. However, the enrolment for the coming year 2024-25 is the lowest since the opening of the school, with only six Auroville students. After meeting with parents, facilitators and TLC management, and given the current situation and the current financial constraints, the SAIER Board has decided that TLC as it currently functions will be closed at the end of this academic year (July 2024),” wrote SAIER. The TLC facilitators have taken the closure as an opportunity for TLC to go on a different journey, stating that “Discontinuing under the SAIER umbrella will enable us to continue our active research in Integral Education without having to justify or compromise on our visions, goals and their implementation, which clearly do not fit with the definitions of a school as set down by SAIER.” They are in communication with the GB-FAMC to move TLC to another umbrella under the Auroville Foundation.

Auroville Fellowships
The Auroville Foundation has advertised for 30 fellowships positions: Social-Media (4) , General Management (2), IT (6), Medicine and Health Management (2), Agriculture / Forestry / Environmental Engineers (2), Economists (2), Educational Researchers (2), Civil Engineers / Structural engineers (2), Marketing (2), performing artist for music / dance / drama/ other art forms (4), and Security Officers (2). Qualifications are to have a graduation degree in the particular domain, a minimum 2 years of experience, must be physically fit and available for at least one year in Auroville and should be committed to the ideals of the Auroville and abide by the code of conduct during the Fellowship period. The Fellows will be assigned to various units of Auroville during the engagement period. He/she will be required to put in at least 8 hours of work each day studying the existing system, suggesting innovative solutions, and implementing the solutions approved to improve the process of the unit to improve its output. The Auroville Foundation will provide the selected fellows with accommodation, food, and internal movement facility along with a basic stipend.

Positive news from Auroville farmers
Auroville farmers reported that despite the recent setbacks, they sent 3,128 kilos of 46 different vegetables, 3,301 kilos of 24 sorts of fruit, 19,764 eggs, 6,327 litres of milk, 846 kilos of various sorts of rice and 327 kg of polished and unpolished varagu (the latter procured from the bioregion and processed in Auroville) to FoodLink in March to be distributed to the Auroville community. The farmers hope in their next month report to include produce from Auroville farms distributed through other channels, “some of which spreads the blessings from our farms to Puducherry and beyond.” Those who would like to explore the whole world of food in Auroville, which includes not

only how it is grown but its cultural meaning in this international township, are invited to visit the website <https://foodpathsauroville.com> and download a free digital book from <https://tinyurl.com/3kxm9kx8>

Award for Bernard Declercq
On the occasion of the 86th birth anniversary of the late Dr G Nammalvar, who was an Indian green crusader, agricultural scientist, environmental activist and organic farming expert, Aurovilian Bernard Declercq was presented with the Vanagam Award For Lifetime Achievement in honour of his consistent efforts, along with those of his wife Deepika, to reforest the barren land of Auroville's Pebble Garden. The Nammalvar Ecological Foundation for Global Food Security and Farm Research created this special award to acknowledge and recognise Bernard's silent and decades-long contribution towards re-greening the planet.

ELLE Sustainability Award 2024
Elle, the Indian edition of the worldwide lifestyle magazine of French origin called Elle, has awarded the ELLE Sustainability Award 2024 to Aurovilian Uma Prajapati for her work in the field of sustainability in the last 20 years. “As the founder of Upasana, Uma has transformed the fashion landscape by seamlessly weaving ethics and aesthetics into every facet of her work ...he is an unwavering advocate for sustainable practices ...her empowering spirit towards countless artisans and workers along the supply chain has been recognised through the ELLE Sustainable Style Vision Award.”

Awards for Auroville architects
In March 2024 it was announced that Suhasini Laxman Iyer had won the Indian Institute of Architects IIA National Awards 2022 in the category Residential Projects for the Humancapex Habitat buildings. Architect Mona Doctor Pingel won two awards, one in the category Women Architect in the Forefront for her Studio Naqsbandi, the other in the category Mercantile Retail for her Cottage showroom. Auroville architects Ganesh Bala Iyer and Neha Dige won the award in the category Conservation and Restoration and Preservation and Adaptive Reuse for André and Prema's old house in Auromodele, originally designed by Roger Anger.

Auroville choir 30 years film
Auroras Eye Films (an Auroville unit) recently produced a documentary celebrating 30 years of the Auroville Choir. The film can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XnNMPv63U4>

YouthLink's vision: A Vocational Training Centre
YouthLink informed the community that it would like to create a Vocational Training Centre to provide for a safe environment where Auroville youth and youth coming to Auroville can explore and develop various skills, and contribute to positive change without the need to leave the community. The Centre is envisaged as a campus that nurtures individuals through interpersonal bonding. A rough curriculum will be ready by July 2024. For more information contact Youthlink@auroville.org.in.

PASSINGS

Eveline Preibsch

On March 26th, Eveline Preibsch left her body in Sweden. Together with Ulf and Staffan she had been taking care of the work of Auroville International Sweden since 1983, providing a stable connection between Sweden and Auroville. Eveline was a strong woman. In her contained and quiet way, she held Auroville's four qualities of goodness, generosity, equality and peace in her movements and actions. Eveline had gone through cancer in 2005 which after some years had returned. In the last two years she had been living a quiet life, giving up her regular winter visits to Auroville.



About Auroville Today

Auroville Today is an activity of the Kattidakalai Trust of the Auroville Foundation. The GST number is 33AAATA0037BXZV

Contact: Auroville Today, Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India, Phone: +91.413.2622572. Email: avtoday@auroville.org.in.

Subscription information

Subscription rates for 12 issues:
India: Print + digital edition: Rs 850
Other countries: Print + digital edition: Rs 4,000 equivalent.
Digital only edition: Rs 3,000 equivalent.



How to subscribe:

- Through our website: Subscriptions can be ordered and paid on-line through <https://auroville.today> and <https://www.auroville.com>.
- By cheque: Cheques must be payable to *Auroville Maintenance*, reference *Contribution Auroville Today*, and need to be sent to

Auroville Today, Surrender community, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu, India.

3. By bank transfer. Bank transfers are to be made to account # 163101000118 of Auroville Maintenance at ICICI Bank, Auroville Branch, IFSC Code ICIC0001631, Swift Code ICICINBBCTS, reference: Contribution Auroville Today.

Editorial team:

Alan, Carel, Chandra, Gita, Peter. Proofreading: Alan. DTP: Carel. Print Editing: Jean-Denis. Digital Editing: Krishna V Published by Carel Thieme on behalf of the Auroville Foundation. Printed by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, and published at Surrender, Auroville 605101, Tamil Nadu.