

Serving the spirit of service

The bimonthly communications from the Auroville Board of Services / ServiceLink in the *News and Notes*, the weekly internal Auroville newsletter, are commendable for their regularity and in-depth information. But what is ServiceLink? And what, exactly, is the Auroville Board of Services?

“The Auroville Board of Services (ABS) aims at bringing together all the service activities of Auroville, so that they can share their aspirations and difficulties, their projects and their experiences,” says Anandi. “We agreed on this name as we wanted to ‘organize’ them similarly to the way the commercial units have been ‘organized’ in the Auroville Board of Commerce (ABC). But there is no ‘Board’ with any kind of authority, as such. All services are automatically members and a meeting of the Board of Services means a meeting to which the managers of all service activities are invited. It’s, in fact, a name we are not attached to.”

Anandi manages the Pour Tous Distribution Centre (PTDC) and is an active member of the Human Resource Team and the Budget Coordination Committee. Together with Isha, she is fully involved with the ABS and with ServiceLink.

“The work of supporting and assisting the services, providing them with information and helping them become more coordinated and effective in their work, is done through ServiceLink, the coordinating channel which represents the ABS,” explains Isha. “This ‘service for services’ can be in the form of identifying problems and offering management tools and solutions, advice on appropriate operational frameworks, or simple help with text editing or promotion work.”

She explains, “For example, when the Budget Coordination Committee (BCC), the group that is responsible for drafting Auroville’s annual budget and recommending allocations, requested the services to present yearly budgets, many service managers had doubts on how to go about this. Here ServiceLink offers help. ServiceLink also provides the secretarial function for the ABS, for general meetings, area meetings and drafting proposals. ServiceLink in turn is helped in its task by the Services Support Team, a rotational group of 5 service managers with long years of dedicated work in Auroville’s service sector.”

Should the ABS then be seen as the pressure group of the services? “No,” says Anandi, “The ABS is not that; it isn’t a special interest group. It tries to represent the particular aspirations and difficulties experienced by those working in our services, including those who work for funded projects or some special income-generating activities. This need has meanwhile been acknowledged by the FAMC (the finance and economic policy setting group) and in the BCC where one representative of the ABS has a permanent seat.”

The specific difficulties of the Services

Is there a sympathetic hearing in the BCC for the requirements of the services? “There is,” says Isha, “but often we hear the critique that there are too many services to be supported by Auroville’s limited income. Many services have started as projects, on the initiative of an individual who, after some time, requests financial support when it seems the service has become ‘essential’ for the community. The community, through the BCC, needs to prioritize which services should be developed and supported.”

She also elaborates on the concept of self-supporting services. “To minimize the financial impact of service budgets on Auroville’s self-generated income, previous Economy groups have encouraged a diverse system of partially or fully self-supporting services, where the services collect income from individual users in order to cover their expenditure. The Electrical Service and Auroville Bakery operate in this way. But this



Anandi (left) and Isha

reflects a market-driven approach. It is not in conformity with Mother’s ideals, when applied to an internal economy serving the needs of those who work entirely for Auroville and its development. In our context, it becomes economically backward.”

“I believe that the Auroville administration is less aware of the specific difficulties of the services,” adds Anandi. “The BCC, like their predecessor, the Economy Group, is very concerned about expenditure, so it demands budget requests and projections, and scrutinizes figures and accounts. But this attitude doesn’t really encourage the services or helps them to improve their functioning – in fact, in some ways it actually discourages them. The BCC could help more by providing a transparent economic overview showing all avenues of income and expenditure, and by actively increasing the income.”

She explains, “Those who work for Auroville’s service activities are people who have the spirit of service. That doesn’t imply that they are all expert managers or fully-qualified financial administrators. Now these people are scrutinized disproportionately compared to those who run a commercial unit or who are self-supporting. They have to present budgets and account for every paisa, and moreover are the only ones in Auroville whose material well-being (their personal ‘maintenance’) is decided by other people.”

Isha clarifies, “Auroville is a place where everybody is meant to find ways to express themselves and nurture their inner development through their work. The present maintenance system, as reflected by the support provided in goods and services, needs a lot of attention. This is also reflected in the way in which services themselves are being supported, financially and otherwise.”

The universal maintenance concept

One of the ways that is being investigated is the concept of a ‘universal maintenance’. “We are all Aurovilians, all working for Auroville, part of the same family, part of the same system,” says Anandi. “We

should all be maintained in a similar and balanced way, following the same channels. The concept of an Auroville universal maintenance would imply that everybody in Auroville would receive more or less the same type of maintenance packets from the same source, so that there would be no major differences. Instead of directly paying their executives and staff, commercial units could transfer that money through Auroville’s internal channels. Self-supporting people could then also contribute the equivalent of their living expenses through these same channels. We believe that such a system would make everybody feel part of the same Auroville, under one economic umbrella.

“We are also concerned that Aurovilians really work for Auroville. Those who work for themselves, while living in Auroville – well, what can we say? Those energies are for the most part lost to Auroville. At present those people are asked to pay an extra contribution to Auroville. It would be far better to design a system where the energies of these people can contribute more directly to the development of Auroville.”

Do they consider themselves purists in adhering to the principles of the economy as indicated by The Mother? Anandi nods. “We believe that the Dream of the Mother, her economic model, is the only way forward if Auroville is not to become an ordinary city. You can call us dreamers if you like, as opposed to the pragmatists who look primarily at so-called realities and feasibilities. But both have their intrinsic value and we very much need to reach a balanced approach.”

“The Mother’s Dream includes cultivating the spirit of work as an offering – of service,” says Isha. “The spirit of service means the joy of service. If that is not a cornerstone of our collective consciousness, in our daily work, then there is something essential missing. It is this important aspect that gives meaning to our life in Auroville, and it should be actively encouraged.”

In conversation with Carel

ENVIRONMENT

Hunting the poachers

The rare sight of a deer, the frequently observed encounter with a jackal, the swift flight of a rabbit, the powerful archaic feel of a monitor lizard and the noisy passing of a couple of porcupines fills one’s heart with joy that our reforestation efforts have made it possible for wildlife to return.

The first to come back were the birds. Some of them are on the list of threatened species. The horn bill owl for instance. There was a time when several of these magnificent birds lived in the Forecomers canyon. Then they disappeared. Now again there are rare sightings. But the other night I heard the call of a

bird which I have never heard before and to my own dismay a sad thought crept out of my mind, “How long will it survive before it is shot?”

For since several years now our wildlife, regardless of whether it freely roams the sky above or is bound to the few acres of afforested land, have been under constant threat of being killed. The blast of rifles in the early morning hours in the Forecomers canyon heralds the demise of one or more creatures.

For long we didn’t know how to solve the situation. Help came in the form of a group of determined young men who are part of a Pondicherry NGO called *Animal Security*.

They assisted the Pondicherry Forest Department to arrest the poachers by joining a hunt with the offer of Rs.1,000 for the quills of a porcupine. Four poachers were caught red-handed, their country rifles seized and a fine of Rs. 10,000 was levied. After their interrogation, three more poachers were arrested.

Those poachers ran a racket that sold body parts of endangered species on request as well as on the public market. A lucrative criminal business has received a severe blow and one can only hope that the sanctions and penalties handed out by the Forest Department will stop the illegal hunting for a long time.

Bindu



Indian Crested porcupine (*Hystrix indica*)

In brief

Documentary film on Sri Aurobindo

April 4th, 2010 will be the 100th anniversary of Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in Pondicherry. The Union Minister of State for Planning, Parliamentary Affairs and Culture, Mr. V. Narayanasamy, has given the green light for making a documentary film on Sri Aurobindo. The film, directed by ‘Gunavanti Mainthan’ Ravi, will be released on April 4th, 2010, marking the centenary of Sri Aurobindo’s arrival in Pondicherry. The event will also be commemorated by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, by the Pondicherry government as well as in Auroville.

Matrimandir Test Pond

L’Avenir d’Auroville informed the community that permission for building the Matrimandir test pond is still pending. A Task Force Matrimandir Test Pond/Lake has been set-up to advise if the test pond can serve to verify the feasibility of the parameters set for the lake by late Roger Anger as well as environmental parameters. The Matrimandir Lake should be environmentally sustainable. Another point of discussion is the size of the test pond.

At the end of November 2009, discussions were held with a renowned water specialist and geo hydrologist from Ahmedabad on the test pond, the proposed future lake, and the entire water situation in the Auroville area. The report of the expert is awaited.

Banyan tree

The soil level under the Banyan tree, the geographical centre of Auroville, has been raised by some 25 centimetres with a mixture of light soils. No soil was put around the main trunk because that might accelerate its decay. The Banyan is thought to be about 100 years old, and its main trunk is already hollow. The tree has 29 secondary trunks, some of them with a diameter of up to one meter. These will support the canopy of the tree as the central trunk slowly decays. Two narrow paths were laid under the branches of the tree to form the border for the gardens of *Life and Power*. The work under the Banyan tree will be completed with the installation of a new set of granite benches.

Auroville Marathon 2010



PHOTO RAMESH

The third Auroville Marathon will happen on February 14, 2010. Running enthusiasts are invited to register at: www.marathon.auroville.com

Auroville market starts again

The Auroville Market has restarted and now happens every Saturday morning opposite the Solar Kitchen. Auroville farm products and arts and handicrafts are sold and while information is shared about social, economic and environmental sustainability for Auroville and the surrounding neighbourhood.