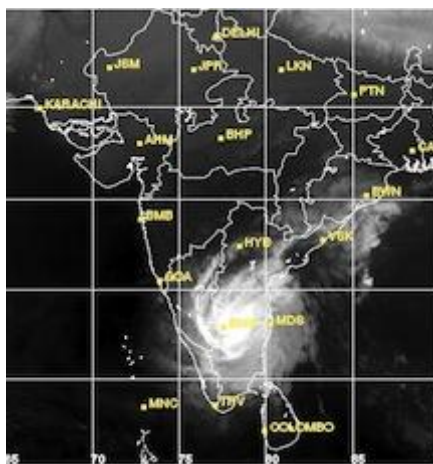




Cyclone Devastates Auroville



On Friday December 30, cyclone Thane hit the states of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry with heavy rains and wind speeds of up to 135 kmph (83 mph) and tidal surges of up to 1.5 metres (5 feet). The cyclone hit the coast from Chennai to Karaikal. The Villupuram district is among the worst hit as the cyclone epicenter was close to Pondicherry.

Auroville was in the midst of Thane's direct fury, leaving a trail of destruction. Thousands of trees have been uprooted or decapitated; houses, schools, offices, industries and public buildings were damaged due to heavy winds and falling trees.

While the Matrimandir itself was not damaged, some branches of the Banyan Tree were broken off and in the Matrimandir gardens and around it, many trees fell down. Similarly, the gardens of Savitri Bhavan, the Visitor's Centre and Bharat Nivas suffered heavily, though there was no damage to the buildings. In the Sadhana Forest and Sve Dam communities, all the keet houses were fully destroyed.



The road near Arati.

In the new Luminosity community, the louvers of the new building warped in the winds, leaving the glass windows behind it to face the full impact of the hurricane; many shattered. In the Samasti and Grace and Surrender communities, almost all beautiful ornamental trees fell down. In Madhuca, the tile roof of one of the houses blew off, while in Certitude, a couple narrowly escaped certain death by leaving the house a few minutes before a tree fell down on their house with a major branch landing on their bed.

At the Auroville beach communities, the situation was judged worse than the 2004 tsunami, with high waves compounding the damage caused by falling trees. The Auroville farms suffered heavily, with one farmer complaining that 40 years of work has

gone with uprooted fruit trees and crops being severely damaged. In some of the Auroville forests, more than 70% of the trees have fallen.

The commercial units suffered as well. The office of Upasana suffered a direct hit from a falling tree, while the office of Auromodèle Atelier was narrowly saved with the tree falling in front of its entrance. In the villages around Auroville, the damage is no less. The landscape which Auroville has been at great pains to build over the last 40 years has been disfigured and mutilated.

In the evening of that day, when the storm abated, many Aurovilians were seen trying to find their way on roads covered by fallen trees and debris. "I got lost," said a long-term Aurovillian, trying to get from the Surrender to the Dana community. "The road had disappeared."

On December 31st, the work of clearing the main roads and making an inventory of the damage started. The sound of chainsaws could be heard all Auroville. Many Auroville youngsters and others were seen clearing main roads and pathways. Chainsaws being in short supply, residents were seen using ordinary saws and cutties, trying to clear the entrances and internal pathways of their communities. Certitude was heavily hit, with most of the Eucalyptus trees that line the entrance road having fallen over. The well-known Eucalyptus Grove, opposite the turn to Samasti, no longer exists. Some of the



The Eucalyptus Grove

Aurovilians living in the greenbelt had literally to hack their way out of the forest.

This is a state of emergency. Some communities suffer from the lack of water supply. There is no electricity. The electricity supply, which had stopped at the first signs of Thane approaching, will not be reinstalled for about two weeks with over 30 high tension and all low tension lines being destroyed. Some telephones work – but most do not.

Assessments of the damage start coming in. At a first rough estimate, the immediate emergency relief would need Rs 4-5 Crores (approximately

£650,000). The estimates for long-term rehabilitation and restoration will run into many times that amount. The detailed assessment will be undertaken after the emergency phase is over.

The Auroville community asks its friends and well-wishers for financial help which is most urgent. Please make a donation for Auroville Cyclone Relief through your Auroville International UK, or directly to Auroville.

You may send a cheque to:

Auroville International UK, 7 Cubb Field, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP19 7SJ

Or donate online at www.aviuk.org/donate.htm

We appreciate your generosity during this difficult moment.