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L&T seeks to install CCTVs at Aarey Colony

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Larson & Toubro Limited (L&T) has moved an application in the western zone bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), seeking permission to install 75 cameras at 24 locations in Aarey Colony. The company, which has apparently learnt about the NGT stay order of August 19, 2015 on the construction work in the colony only recently, has requested it be granted permission on the condition of not harming the ecology of the vicinity and in the larger safety concerns of the people.

However, as the matter will be heard on May 19, conservationists said their only concern is footage of leopard activity falling in the wrong hands and stated they would request the tribunal to involve the forest department while safeguarding data recorded by the cameras.

L&T was awarded the contract for the design, development, implementation and maintenance of a surveillance system of 6,000 CCTV cameras last year. While the company was supposed to complete work in the North Zone in phases, it was supposed to complete the installation of all the cameras at Aarey Colony by March 2016. Though L&T had been applying for several permissions for constructing light poles with local police officials and the electrical department and CEO of Aarey Milk Colony since December 2015, only on April 27, 2016, CEO of Aarey Colony communicated the NGT order to the company and informed it that he didn't have the authority to grant permission for the same since the matter was being heard by the NGT.

Officials of the firm said in the application that they would ensure that there was no harm to the ecology while installing the surveillance system. "The process of installing the CCTV cameras with the poles does not comprise any construction activities that would adversely impact environment and ecology, there will be no cutting/ felling of trees installing 75 CCTV cameras and poles," says the application. NGT has confirmed it will hear the application on May 19.

NGO Vanashakti, which had filed the petition, urging NGT to declare Aarey Colony a No-Development Zone, said that it welcomed the setting up of CCTV cameras but had reservations about the footage of leopard activities falling in the wrong hands. "We will urge NGT to involve the forest department to safeguard the footage captured by these 75 cameras. The footage falling in the hands of poachers can adversely affect the conservation efforts of the species. We can't let police officials have the footage; let it be the property of the forest department," said Stalin D. from Vanashakti.