



State handed over Aarey land to Metro corp illegally: NGO

Aarey Colony is Eco Sensitive Zone



VIRAT A SINGH |



ATEEQ SHAIKH | Thu, 31 Mar 2016-07:05am , dna

In its affidavit, the NGO stated that MMRCL – the body looking after execution of Colaba-Bandra-SEEPZ Metro Line III – had initially submitted a proposal for acquiring 30 hectares of land for the car shed.

Making its stand clear against the state government's proposal of handing over three hectares land in Aarey Colony to the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Limited (MMRCL), NGO Vanashakti has asked for quashing of the government resolution (GR). The NGO had earlier filed a plea with the National Green Tribunal (NGT), against the Metro III car depot in Aarey Colony, and the hearing was scheduled for Wednesday.



In its affidavit, the NGO stated that MMRCL – the body looking after execution of Colaba-Bandra-SEEPZ Metro Line III – had initially submitted a proposal for acquiring 30 hectares of land for the car shed. They then reduced it to 20 hectares, on the ground that 16 stabling lines would be set up, including the Metro workshop.

"Even as the proceedings were on, contrary to NGT orders, the state government issues a GR, seeking to hand over additional three hectares to MMRCL for Metro car depot workshop and commercial purposes. This is complete violation of rules as the Aarey Colony is an Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ) and also falls within No Development Zone," stated the affidavit submitted to the NGT.

"In the affidavit, we have requested for an order, quashing the GR issued by the state, and for directions to the state to not alter the land use in Aarey Colony. We have also sought to restrain MMRCL from carrying out any activity for the purpose of setting up the Metro car shed or any other commercial building," said Stalin D, Director (Projects) for Vanashakti.

Meanwhile, members of the Aarey Conservation Group (ACG) claimed that till date, MMRCL has made no attempt at all to ensure that Metro car shed is accommodated at any other site, as suggested by the expert committee set up by the state government.

"There are several other alternative sites, including at MU's Kalina campus, Sariput Nagar close to Aarey, BKC and other places. But the officials are simply pursuing Aarey Colony, which proves there is an ulterior motive," said a member.

Another alternative suggested by Vanashakti was to have a car depot inside Royal Palms complex, as the developer has offered it to the government in lieu of Floor Space Index. Property prices at Royal Palms in Goregaon are among the lowest in Mumbai. With a depot inside the complex, connectivity and transportation will be better. But government officials are staying away from this option, as it is likely to snowball into a political controversy, with opponents likely to charge government for favouring a private developer.

The NGO also found a blunder in forest department's affidavit, which will now be filed again after correction. The next hearing has been scheduled on April 29.

Meanwhile, in another embarrassment for the forest department, petitioners have asked forest department to clarify why they have not included Aarey as forest and instead shown the collector's report of 1997, which shows 1,400 hectare of forest seen while standing in film city as "mangrove forest", which is wrong and absurd as mangroves cannot grow on a hillock away from coast.