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Green activists hit out at Maharashtra CM

Mar 20, 2016 | Age Correspondent | Mumbai

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Intent on not giving up the Save Aarey Colony campaign, environmentalists have targeted chief minister Devendra Fadnavis's statement in the Assembly session of constructing car depot for the proposed 33.5-km Colaba-Seepz-Bandra Metro-3 at Aarey colony.

The environmentalists have questioned Mr Fadnavis' statement about constructing the car depot at Aarey colony when the matter is already under the litigation with the National Green Tribunal (NGT). "The Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation (MMRC) on Thursday in an affidavit submitted to the NGT has already that till the matter is pending with the NGT, MMRC will not start any work on ground to construct car depot," D. Stalin, environmentalist and director of NGO Vanashakti said.

In August this year, while hearing a plea filed by NGO Vanashakti and a few others, seeking the declaration of Aarey Colony as a No Development Zone (NDZ), the NGT had directed the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) not to allow any construction in the colony.

Mr Fadnavis had, on Thursday, in the Assembly said, "It is not my personal Metro. I am from Nagpur and I will go back to Nagpur after I retire. Around 350 trees would need to be cut to construct a Metro car shed on the proposed site. None of these trees are endangered. We will replant them elsewhere. We have another option of moving the car shed 1.5 kilometres further from the proposed site. But it is a marshy land and building a car shed there will increase the project cost by Rs 1,500 crore."

While the environmentalists have further alleged that Ashwini Bhide, managing director of MMRC has maintained that 1,000 trees will be chopped for constructing car depot on 24 hectares plot and Mr Fadnavis put the figure at 350 trees. "Who is speaking the truth? Why is the MMRC and the state government in a hurry when there are many other major challenges to overcome before the project takes off," added Mr Stalin.

In a press conference held on Saturday, environmentalists further alleged that there are three prominent developers who have purchased huge land parcels near the proposed car depot site and once the permission for car depot is granted, the builder lobby will get back side entry into Aarey Colony in order to convert the green belt into an urban jungle.