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Title : HC stay on plan to axe trees in SoBo for Metro III to continue

Author : Shibu Thomas

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'Foliage Key To Human Survival'

The Bombay high court on Friday continued its interim stay on the cutting of trees for the Metro III project.

A division bench of Chief Justice Manjula Chellur and Justice Girish Kulkarni also allowed the petitioners, who have challenged the permission to cut trees, to inspect documents of the BMC and the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation Ltd (MMRCL).

The judges emphasized that there was a fine balance between development and the toll on the environment. "Development cannot happen without some hardships, but we will have to check whether it is a hardship or if it is a massacre (of trees)," remarked the Chief Justice.

The judge reiterated the importance of trees and expressed concern over the fast-depleting green cover. "For human existence trees are necessary. They are important for the future generations," said the judge, adding, "Looking to the situation, if I visit the city in 20 years I will not find green cover, only brown (referring to concrete structures)."

The HC had earlier this month asked MMRCL to place on record information regarding survey made before it proceeded with cutting of over 5,000 trees for the Metro III line between Seepz, Andheri and Colaba. The court is hearing two petitions, one by Pervin Jehangir (65) challenging the legality of the Metro construction and another by Nina Verma (76) against the hacking of trees in Churchgate, Hutatma Chowk and Cuffe Parade. The court had earlier stayed the cutting of trees.

In an affidavit, Jitendra Pardeshi, tree officer and superintendent of gardens, BMC, informed the HC that of the 132 trees in Hutatma Chowk, the Tree Authority had granted permission for the felling of 45 trees and transplantation of 76 trees. Only 11 of the existing trees was to be retained.

The Tree Authority had set a condition for MMRCL that once the work on the Hutatma Chowk Metro station was completed it would have to plant around 135 trees. The authority also admitted that it had found that some discrepancies in the measurements pointed out by the petitioners was found to be correct. The BMC would seek an explanation for the discrepancies, added the affidavit.

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FLORA UNDER THREAT