

Forest dept must be involved in planning of public projects: HC

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New Delhi: Delhi High Court on Wednesday refused to vacate its stay on tree felling in the capital until the forest department clarifies if it was involved in the planning of public projects.

Hearing an urgent plea of the govt and Delhi Metro Railway Corporation (DMRC) seeking to fast-track permissions to cut trees for stalled projects, Justice Jasmeet Singh asked the principal chief conservator of forests to consider filing an affidavit giving details of the department's involvement when civic agencies plan infrastructure projects.

Posting the matter for next week, the court asked the govt to explain how it was implementing past directions of National Green Tribunal and HC that forest department must be part of project planning so that all agencies are on the same page on saving or transplanting the trees.

The court partially allowed DMRC's plea to direct the concerned tree officer to examine its application to cut down 215 trees in relation to its fourth-phase project. But added a rider that in case the tree officer allows DMRC's plea, the same will not be given effect till the next hearing. Advocate Aditya N Prasad, appearing on behalf of the petitioner in the matter on preservation of city's green cover, opposed the plea and said DMRC is seeking to fell around 14,000 trees.

The court had earlier stayed felling of trees in the capital in view of "total non-application of mind" by officials while granting permissions and asked Delhi govt to file data with respect to transplantation of trees.

On Wednesday, the court found that such an affidavit was yet to be filed. Delhi govt has moved the court seeking certain "clarification" in the order passed on Aug 31 last year, which said that no permission for felling of trees

would be granted.

It has urged the court to permit authorities concerned to consider more than 200 pending applications for tree felling or transplantation in relation to several infrastructure projects in the capital, 14 of them being from government bodies.