

{ GOVT DEFENDS CAR SHED AT AAREY }

# Metro 3 to be operational by Dec 2023: dy CM

**HT Correspondent**

htmumbai@hindustantimes.com

**MUMBAI:** Chief minister Eknath Shinde on Thursday made it clear that the government stands by its decision to develop the Metro 3 car shed at Aarey milk colony while his deputy Devendra Fadnavis announced that the Colaba-Seepz line would be operational by December 2023 and not a single tree would be cut for the depot.

Speaking in the assembly on the last day of the monsoon session, Shinde said the car shed plot touches Jogeshwari-Vikhroli Link Road and is surrounded by roads on three sides. "It is not in the core area of the forests," he said, questioning why the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) had not notified the plot at Aarey as a reserve forest.

The CM justified the controversial decision of the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation

(MMRC) to fell trees in the middle of the night in October 2019. "Once permissions have been given to cut trees, [it does not matter if] they have been felled at night or at noon. If this was not done at night, they could have been cut the next day."

Participating in a debate on infrastructure projects in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, Fadnavis said like Shiv Sena leaders they would not make it an ego issue.

"The entire line has been delayed because of the process to shift the project out of Aarey, which cost ₹400 crore to the state exchequer. The decision was taken by the Uddhav Thackeray-led government despite the expert committees appointed by the state and the Centre suggesting that the shed at Kanjurmarg would not be feasible for technical and commercial reasons. I had requested the then CM to restart the work at Aarey as it needed



**Coaches for the Colaba-Seepz Metro corridor at Aarey colony before their trial run.**

VIJAY BATE/HT PHOTO

no further cutting of trees, but he was hell bent on his decision," he said.

Shinde said that the MVA's decision to relocate the car shed could have been caught in a legal tangle. "Metro 3 is a project of the MMRC. Of the

total project cost, 50% is being funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency as a soft loan and 20% by the union government. The two were not consulted while shifting the car shed out of Aarey. This could have led to massive litigation

and the project could have been held up."

Fadnavis also took a dig at the environmentalists. "Some of them are genuine while a few opposing the Metro shed at Aarey operate commercially. The funding source of some of the NGOs like Vanashakti needs to be checked."

"Aarey is spread over a 3,300 acres and earlier land parcels have been allocated to the film city, the agriculture university, MAIDC [Maharashtra Agro Industries Development Corporation Limited] and Modern Bakery. The car shed is not an exception. Here, we gave just 25 hectares for the project," Shinde said.

As many as 326 hectares had been newly notified as a forest, he said, pointing to the MVA government's decision in October 2020 to declare a patch of land at Aarey as a reserve forest. "Why was the car shed land not included in it?"