

EXPERT SLAMS GOVT'S MONKEY BUSINESS

OVER THE YEARS



■ Delhi monkeys, like their counterparts from the rest of the country, were being exported till 1978.

■ **IN 1980**, there were 2,000 rhesus monkeys in Delhi, of which 30 per cent were living in human habitation areas, and there were hardly any instance of monkey-related problems.

■ **BY 1987**, the number of monkeys had gone up to 4,000 and about 40 per cent were in human habitation areas; some problems had started.

■ **BY 1997**, the number had gone up to 5,000, 55 per cent were present in human habitation areas, further increasing problems.

■ Municipal corporations aren't equipped for the management of wild animals. Thus, over the years, MCD trapped monkeys in ones and twos, haphazardly and cruelly. This led to chaotic breaking of the groups and the monkeys becoming more aggressive.

■ **IN 1998**, a plan to control the monkey menace in Delhi was initiated by the Ministry of Environment & Forests.

■ MCD never got trained trappers or organised any training session for them.

■ **IN 2001**, the men who could trap big fierce-looking langurs were hired on a daily basis. Every morning they travelled to monkey-inhabited buildings of Lutyens' Delhi on bicycles. The langurs scared the monkeys away

■ The result was that monkeys got thinly spread out over the city. Delhiites were suffering; monkeys were pests they wanted to get rid of.



Says report tweaked by govt to show no monkey died in city wildlife sanctuary

By Darpan Singh in New Delhi

PRIMATOLOGIST Iqbal Malik has blown the lid off "large-scale irregularities" in managing monkeys in Asola-Bhatti, Delhi's lone wildlife sanctuary.

Her charge is serious because early this year, the Delhi government used her expert report to save its skin and said that no monkey died when the wildlife department failed to supply feed to the animals for three weeks in December last year.

The contractor had stopped supplies because of pending bills. On Sunday, she also wrote an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and raised the larger issue of human-monkey conflict.

Malik now says the government misused her report and created a false impression, as she had exposed large-scale irregularities which the government — in its report — conveniently omitted. "The condition of monkeys in the sanctuary is much worse than it was before they were translocated from urban areas," she said.

Delhi's Lt Governor Najeeb Jung had on December 27 ordered a probe after animal activist and Union minister Maneka Gandhi apprehended that some 1,000 monkeys had starved to death in the 4,845-acre south Delhi sanctuary. "I did say the monkeys cannot be dying just because the official feed, which is not their sole source of diet, stopped. But I also pointed out a lot of other things that's wrong with the way the government is managing the monkeys and the sanctuary," she said.

Govt's request

"The government requested with folded hands for my recommendations every time there was a monkey-related crisis. But they never followed my recommendations. I am extremely disappointed," she told MAIL TODAY.

When contacted, forest and wildlife department head Tarun Coomar said: "I have full confidence in Malik's knowledge and expertise.

I will certainly heed her and other experts' advice. We will do everything that's needed to be done in the interest of wildlife and the sanctuary. But she gave her inputs to a probe committee and the final report hasn't come to us. She would have no reason to be disappointed."

Malik says supplying feed to monkeys was never part of the long-term strategy. "Large sums of money were allocated to plant trees, vegetation and build wells. Where did the money go? No tender was done. The contract was given to one particular supplier," Malik pointed out.

Since 2007, when translocation of monkeys started after Delhi's deputy mayor died in a monkey attack, ₹8 crore has been spent on the daily feed that comprises 2,500 kg of fruits and vegetables. The municipal corporations have shifted more than 19,000 monkeys to the sanctuary.

The wildlife department insists even without tenders, there have been no irregularities as the rates are approved by a government price regulator. Officials say the rates (of fruits, vegetables) keep varying, a reason why tenders could not be floated. A process has started to make the system completely transparent, said an official.

The Delhi High Court had in its order asked the wildlife department to feed the rehabilitated monkeys. Corporations had been told to collect food



offerings from temples and use them to feed the simians. To offset rising food bills, the forest department was instructed to raise fruit-bearing trees that could be utilised to feed the animals.

Malik had in her report said since no carcass has been found, so it was unlikely that monkeys had starved to death due to non-availability of food. Sonya Ghosh, member of a court-appointed panel on monkeys' translocation, countered her view. "Since a census has never been done to ascertain the number of monkeys in the

sanctuary, it is difficult to assess the number of deaths. Perhaps this is the reason why a census was never carried out in the first place. The absence of monkey carcasses could simply mean that there is a shortage of staff to comb every part of the sanctuary."

Malik says all government steps have been half-hearted, haphazard, non-scientific, just an eye-wash, soaked in corruption and, thus, failed. "Unplanned, haphazard and secretive way of trapping and releasing in Bhatti area has continued. Monkeys could not be contained in Bhatti without a proper sanctuary and as the boundary was hardly a hindrance monkeys made life miserable for the villagers of the area," she said.

19,000 monkeys captured and shifted to Asola-Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary by civic agencies since 2007

₹8 cr spent on the daily feed that comprises 2,500 kg fruits and vegetables for monkeys at the sanctuary

Primatologist Iqbal Malik says all steps taken by the government to take care of the rehabilitated monkeys have been half-hearted, haphazard and non-scientific.

“The government misused my report and created a false impression. They never paid heed to my suggestions. There are large-scale irregularities.”

—PRIMATOLOGIST IQBAL MALIK

“Malik gave her inputs to a probe committee and the final report hasn't come to us. She would not be disappointed.”

—FOREST DEPARTMENT HEAD TARUN COOMAR