Last month as I passed by the Defence Ministry, I saw people clustered on a sidewalk and I caught a glimpse of a monkey. I stopped and saw three people making two langurs fight with each other. As soon as they saw me, two of the men ran and so did the government employees who were watching this illegal tamasha. The langurs climbed a tree. The remaining man had his pockets searched and, not surprisingly, had a card saying that he was employed by the Defence Ministry to keep rhesus monkeys away. His personal ID card said that his name was Aftab Langoorvala. This is a large Muslim clan who live in Rohini, Delhi. Their only job is to get langurs from the wild and rent them out to various organizations across Delhi – ministries, schools, hotels, malls. They have, at any given time, over 100 langurs. They are so arrogant that they have named themselves Langoorvala as well, and they travel openly on motorbikes with their langurs on their shoulders

I called the police. The security in-charge of that wing of the Defence Ministry was called. He clearly did not know the law and tried to defend his recruitment. He was severely reprimanded. The Langoorvala was arrested and remanded to jail under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. The langurs are with me and they will be rehabilitated soon back in the forest.

You will rarely find a madari in the cities now. Most of them are behind bars or have switched professions ever since the animal laws started being acted on. But in many cities you will find these langoorvalas. You need to have the person arrested and his employer.

According to The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, Langur is a protected species under Schedule II and under the IPC Sections 2, 8, 9, 11, 40, 41, 43, 48, 51, 61, and 62. According to these sections, langurs cannot be owned, traded, bought, sold or hired out. Any violation of this law is liable to a 3 year jail term or fine or both.

But many government offices are openly breaking the law by hiring such people and even giving ID cards to the so called “owners” of langurs – who are actually poachers who have taken these langurs from forests. I am told that during the Commonwealth Games the civic agencies deployed 38 Langurs.

They are badly fed and kept tied to gates the entire day. They are starved and kept thirsty. They sit in the sun and rain and cold. Most of these langurs die within a year. The Langoorvalas simply get more.

Not only is the langur a protected species, it is also becoming increasingly rare. The Langur is a silver grey monkey with a tail longer than its body, a conspicuous black face, long limbs with black hands and feet. It has a coughing alarm call. Langurs live in troops that vary from 8 - 20 animals, and are lead by a dominant male. All male groups are also a common feature.

They generally have a favourite roosting tree, to which the animals retire at the end of the day. The monkeys huddle together and prefer to squat on the extremities of high branches, as a precautionary measure against predators. They are extremely arboreal – which means, that unlike rhesus monkeys, they do not like to come down from the trees at all. They feed in the morning and late afternoon and groom each other in between. Morning is greeted with loud whooping calls and a display of high spirits.

Females attain sexual maturity (3-4 years) earlier than males (6-7 years). The young are born after a gestation period of 6 months. The mothers usually have one child, and the arrival of the early ones in a troop causes much excitement, with females of all age groups vying with each other to touch and handle the new born. The mother readily allows this and the infant gets passed on from hand to hand. The young are carried upside down clasped to their mother's belly. By three months they start wandering around and that is when they get picked off by poachers. Any adult who intervenes, responding to the cries of the babies is beaten with sticks or killed.

The species has suffered tremendously due to habitat degradation. They have to come down to the road and sometimes enter human habitation looking for food, making them vulnerable to accidental death while crossing the road. They are eaten by leopards, dholes, wolves, jackals and pythons. Poaching, and attacks by dogs are also on the rise.

Langurs eat leaves, flowers, fruits and berries. They obtain salt, mineral and trace elements by

licking rocks, termite mounds and salt licks. This animal is now fed rotis and whatever rubbish passersby give it.

The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau has sent a letter on October 15th to all government departments saying that they cannot hire langurs and that any in service have to be removed immediately. The Bureau has written that “For any violation, besides the handler, the officer of the Ministry responsible for hiring the services of the animal will be deemed to have contravened the provision of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and will be liable for prosecution under Section 52 of the Act”. The letter adds: “It is therefore requested that langurs if hired by your Ministry should be removed from their service immediately and the animals be handed over to the Chief Wildlife Warden of the Government of NCT”.

Langurs are as protected as bears and tigers. Can anyone bring tigers or snakes and get “employment” by the government or private companies for domestic or security purposes?

The Wildlife Crime Bureau has now started raiding these Langoorvala families. Many of them are now on the run as criminals and the animals have been confiscated. I have caught 8 langoorvalas myself and the court has sent all of them to jail under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, which means that the court is well aware, as are the police, that this is a crime under the Indian laws.

Now you know the law. If you see any langur tied in a temple, factory, educational institution, mela or any government building call the police and the wildlife authorities and make sure that arrests are made. Take the langur. Ask the Langoorvala where he got the animal from so that it can be returned to its forest otherwise it will die. The Hanuman Langur is a representative of the god Hanuman. Is this the shameful way in which we use our gods?

Maneka Gandhi