

# Champions of the Earth award-2022

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**In news**– Indian wildlife biologist Dr Purnima Devi Barman is among the honourees of Champions of the Earth award-2022, the U.N.'s highest environmental honour.

## About the award-

- The annual 'Champions of the Earth' prize is awarded to outstanding leaders from government, civil society and the private sector whose actions have had a positive impact on the environment.
- Since its inception in 2005, the annual Champions of the Earth award has been awarded to trailblazers at the forefront of efforts to protect our natural world.
- **Champions of the Earth are celebrated in four categories:**
  - **Policy leadership** – individuals or organizations in the public sector leading global or national action for the environment. They shape dialogue, lead commitments and act for the good of the planet.
  - **Inspiration and action** – individuals or organizations taking bold steps to inspire positive change to protect our world. They lead by example, challenge behavior and inspire millions.
  - **Entrepreneurial vision** – individuals or organizations challenging the status quo to build a cleaner future. They build systems, create new technology and spearhead a groundbreaking vision.
  - **Science and innovation**– individuals or organizations who push the boundaries of technology for profound environmental benefit. They invent possibilities for a more sustainable world.

- It is the UN's highest environmental honour. To date, the award has recognised 111 laureates: 26 world leaders, 69 individuals and 16 organisations.

### Dr Purnima Devi Barman-

- Dr. Barman has been honoured with the UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) 2022 Champions of the Earth **award in the Entrepreneurial Vision category.**
- A wildlife biologist, Dr. Barman **leads the "Hargila Army", an all-female grassroots conservation movement dedicated to protecting the Greater Adjutant Stork from extinction.**
- The women create and sell textiles with motifs of the bird, helping to raise awareness about the species while building their own financial independence.
- Dr. Barman is also Senior Project Manager of the Avifauna Research and Conservation Division, Aaranyak.
- Barman's pioneering conservation work has empowered thousands of women, creating entrepreneurs and improving livelihoods while bringing the greater adjutant stork back from the brink of extinction.
- In order to protect the stork, Dr. Barman knew she had to change perceptions of the bird, known locally as "hargila" in Assamese (meaning "bone swallower") and mobilised a group of village women to help her.
- Today the "Hargila Army" consists of over 10,000 women. They protect nesting sites, rehabilitate injured storks which have fallen from their nests and arrange "baby showers" to celebrate the arrival of newborn chicks.

### Greater Adjutant Stork-

- The greater adjutant is a member of the stork family, Ciconiidae. Its genus includes the lesser adjutant of Asia and the marabou stork of Africa.
- Once found widely across southern Asia and mainland southeast Asia, the greater adjutant is now **restricted**

**to a much smaller range with only three breeding populations; two in India, with the largest colony in Assam, a smaller one around Bhagalpur;** and another breeding population in Cambodia.

- They disperse widely after the breeding season. This large stork has a massive wedge-shaped bill, a bare head and a distinctive neck pouch.
- During the day, it soars in thermals along with vultures with whom it shares the habit of scavenging.
- They feed mainly on carrion and offal; however, they are opportunistic and will sometimes prey on vertebrates.
- IUCN status: Endangered.