

The Gaj Gaurav Awards 2026

Context: During the national celebrations of World Elephant Day 2026 held at Visakhapatnam, Union Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change conferred the Gaj Gaurav Awards 2026.



The Gaj Gaurav Awards 2026

- The Gaj Gaurav Award is India's national honor dedicated to recognizing exemplary contributions, outstanding field service, and frontline dedication in the field of Asian elephant conservation and management.

Instituted In: 2022 by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

- Introduced as part of the 30-year milestone celebrations of Project Elephant (launched in 1992) to acknowledge frontline personnel, mahouts, local communities, and forest guards.

Aim: To incentivize, motivate, and honor frontline forest staff, elephant caretakers (mahouts/trackers), Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs), and field conservationists who work in high-risk environments to mitigate human-elephant conflict (HEC), protect corridors, and safeguard wild and captive populations.

Key Features of the Award:

- **Focus on Ground-Level Heroes:** Specifically targets frontline caretakers (mahouts and charakatas), village watchers, forest guards, and local community volunteers who operate directly at the human-wildlife interface.
- **Recognition of Conflict Mitigation & Rescue:** Honors exceptional brave acts, including anti-poaching patrols, preventing train-elephant collisions, managing crop-raiding herds, and rescuing animals during natural disasters.
- **Community & Institutional Inclusivity:** Open to individuals, field teams, and local community bodies such as Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) actively protecting elephant corridors.
- **Captive & Wild Management Integration:** Covers contributions toward both free-ranging wild Asian elephant populations and ethical captive elephant husbandry.
- **Annual World Elephant Day Ceremony:** Presented annually on or around World Elephant Day (August 12) during national Project Elephant ceremonies chaired by Union Environment Ministry officials.

List of 2026 Gaj Gaurav Award Winners:

1. **Jaldapara National Park (West Bengal)** — 7 Mahouts Recognized for outstanding courage during flood rescue operations and wildlife protection during the severe Torsha and Malangi river floods.

- **Bikash Kharia (Mahout):** Awarded for bravery in staying behind during severe currents and guiding stranded kumki (trained) elephants to safety.
- **Rajiv (Rajib) Oraon (Mahout):** Awarded alongside Bikash Kharia for staying with and securing five captive elephants during flash floods.
- **Ajibul Haque (Mahout)**
- **Ajit Gabur (Mahout)**
- **Mumtaz (Mamtaj) Alam (Mahout)**

V.KUMAR'S ACADEMY

- **Amasur (Amashu) Kheriya (Mahout)**
- **Dilip Munda (Mahout)**
- 2. **Namdapha National Park & Tiger Reserve (Arunachal Pradesh) — 2 Caregivers**

Recognized for exceptional service, ethical animal care, and captive elephant management protocols (the sole recipients from the Northeast region).

- **Ganesh Tamang (Senior Elephant Mahout):** Honored for over 26 years of dedicated service in captive elephant care and staff training.
- **Sumit Gogoi (Elephant Attendant):** Recognized for 5 years of service in enhancing captive elephant welfare and management.