Salween River Contamination Crisis

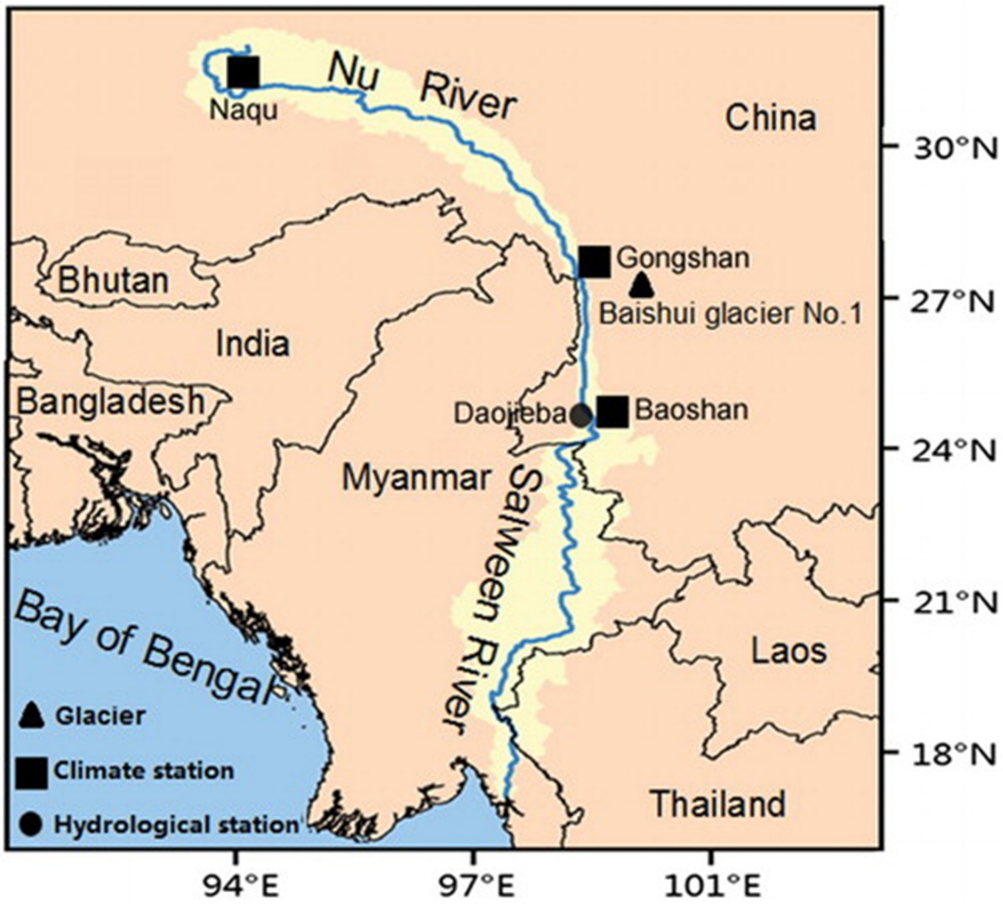
Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Environment*

Why in News?

Recently, Independent testing in September 2025 revealed alarming levels of arsenic contamination in the Salween River.

Salween River

- **Location –** Originates in ***Tibet,*** flows through China and Myanmar, forms part of the Myanmar–Thailand border, and drains into the *Andaman Sea.*
- **Type –** Transboundary free-flowing river system.
- **Length –** 3,300 km; Asia's longest undammed river.
- Supports fisheries, irrigation, and ethnic Karen and Karenni communities; a biodiversity hotspot.



Findings of the Recent Study

- **Contaminants –** ***Arsenic, cadmium, cyanide, mercury*** linked to rare earth and gold mining.
- **Levels –** Arsenic found 5 times over WHO limits are 0.01 mg/l arsenic in water; tributaries recorded up to 0.554 mg/l.
- In situ leaching pumps chemicals underground, dissolving minerals but releasing toxins.
- **Impacts**
  - Fish with sores and deformities; benthic organisms harmed by toxic sediments.
  - Thai rice shipment to Australia was rejected in Oct 2025 due to arsenic contamination.
  - Karen and Karenni villagers face poor information flow, limited alternatives, and reliance on contaminated water/fish.
  - Pollution flows across the Myanmar–Thailand border, raising diplomatic and environmental governance concerns.

Reference

Mongabay | Salween River



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering