

Salween River Contamination Crisis

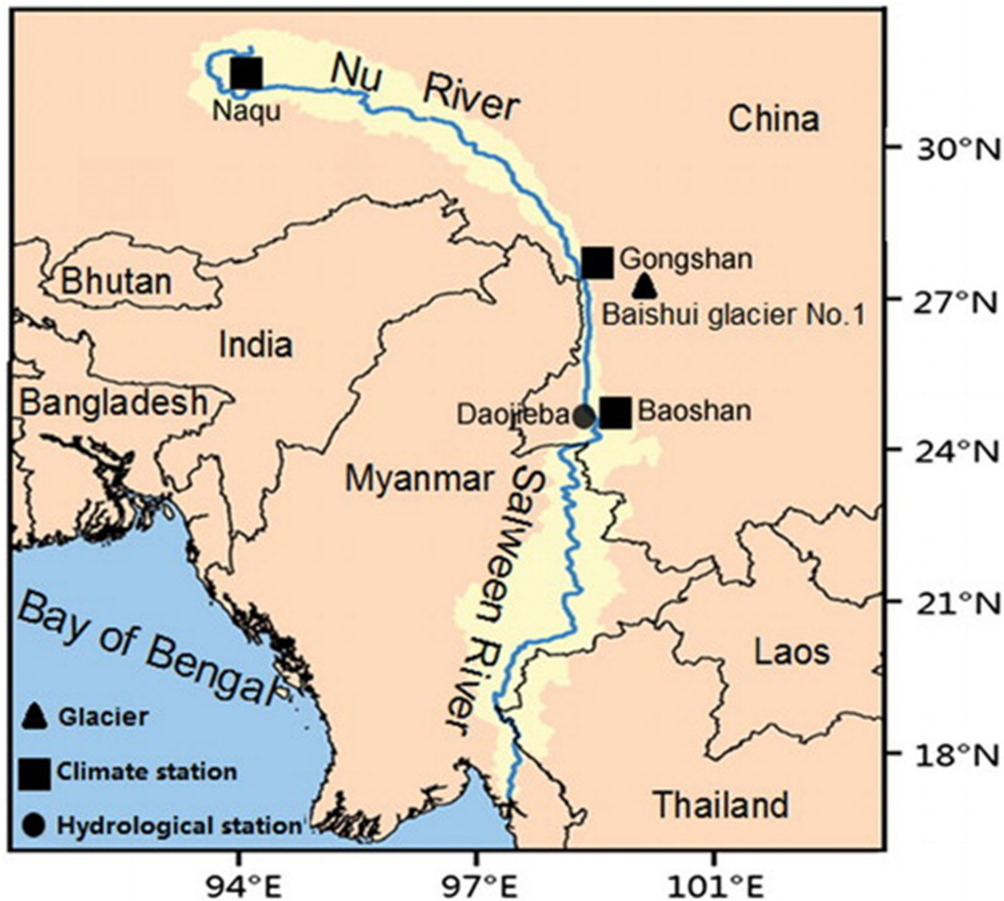
Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Environment

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](#)



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