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The Hindu & The Indian express

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Saltwater crocodile population in Bengal's Sundarban Biosphere Reserve shows substantial increase: survey

Moyurie Som
KOLKATA

The estimated population of saltwater crocodiles, one of the largest reptiles in the world, has increased in the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve (SBR) from last year, according to a survey by the State's Forest Department.

"In comparison [to 2024], there is an increase in the number of all demographic classes [of saltwater crocodiles], specifically in the hatchling class. This is an encouraging sign as sighting of hatchlings is very rare and difficult in the terrain of Sundarbans," the Forest Department report, titled 'Population Assessment and Habitat Ecology Study of Saltwater Cro-



The State government has made major efforts to conserve saltwater crocodiles with a breeding facility opened in 1976. FILE PHOTO

diles in Sundarbans 2025', says.

According to the report released on Monday, the saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) is the largest of all crocodilians and the largest reptile in the world. They are "hypercarnivorous apex predators" that keep flowing water ecosys-

tems clean by feeding on carcasses. In India, saltwater crocodiles are distributed across the swamplands, rivers, mangroves of Odisha and West Bengal and the coastal areas of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The estimated popula-

tion of saltwater crocodiles at the SBR has been found to be between a maximum of 242 and a minimum of 220 this year, with 213 direct sightings recorded during the study. In comparison, last year, the estimated maximum number of saltwater crocodiles in the region had been pegged between 204 and 234.

According to direct sighting data and based on the length of the saltwater crocodiles, a total of 125 adults, 88 juveniles, and 23 hatchlings were traced through direct sightings in 2025. These numbers reflect a considerable increase from the crocodile census done in 2024, where 71 adults, 41 juveniles and only 2 hatchlings were traced through direct sightings.

Meanwhile, the encounter rate of the saltwater crocodiles in the Sundarbans, according to this year's study, is around 0.18 per kilometre, that is, around one saltwater crocodile per 5.5 kilometres of the studied stretch.

GPS mapping

The study was conducted at the SBR through systematic surveys, GPS mapping and habitat characterisation.

The West Bengal government has, in the last many decades, made significant efforts to conserve saltwater crocodiles, with a conservation and breeding facility in the form of the Bhagabatpur Crocodile Project being started in the South 24 Parganas in 1976.

Saltwater crocodile population in Bengal's Sundarban Biosphere Reserve shows substantial increase: survey

Source: The Hindu (Pg-2)

GS Paper: GS-3 → Environment, Conservation, Biodiversity

Context

The population of saltwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus porosus*), are the largest reptiles in the world, has increased in the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve (SBR), West Bengal) compared to last year.

A survey by the West Bengal Forest Department (2025) confirms a rise in population, especially in hatchlings – an encouraging sign for ecosystem stability.



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About Saltwater Crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*)

Largest reptile in the world (up to 6–7 m).

Distribution in India: Sundarbans (West Bengal), Odisha, Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Habitat: Rivers, swamps, estuaries, and mangrove ecosystems.

Ecological Role:

- Apex predator; hyper-carnivore.
- Regulates prey populations.
- Keeps ecosystems clean by feeding on carcasses.

About Saltwater Crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*)

- IUCN Red List: Least Concern (LC)
- CITES: Appendix I (trade strictly regulated).
- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (India): Schedule I (highest protection).

Key Findings of 2025 Survey (Forest Dept., WB)

Population estimate (2025): 220 – 242 individuals.

- Direct sightings: 213.
- Last year's estimate (2024): 204 – 234 individuals.

Break-up (2025):

- 125 adults
- 88 juveniles
- 23 hatchlings (notably rare sighting earlier).

Conservation effort: Bhagabatpur Crocodile Project (South 24 Parganas, est. 1976).

How India's youth can challenge U.S. tariffs

Today, one out of every five young people in the world lives in India. At a time when the youth population is declining not only in high-income countries but also in China, the multitude of its young will be India's trump card

ECONOMIC NOTES

Jayan Jose Thomas

In early August, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that imports from India to the U.S. will be charged tariffs at 50%. This includes a 25% penalty for India's oil purchases from Russia. The U.S. tariffs bring challenges to the Indian economy. What are the policy options for India?

Tariffs are the taxes levied on imports from other countries. The average tariff imposed by the U.S., the world's largest export market, was 2 to 3% for two decades until 2024. All that has changed with President Trump announcing a steep hike in U.S. tariffs on April 2 this year.

If the 50% tariff rate imposed on India takes effect, a shirt that an Indian firm sells for \$10 will cost as much as \$15 for the U.S. consumer. The tariffs on goods from India are higher than the tariffs the U.S. has imposed on India's export competitors (Table 1). Therefore, a similar shirt shipped from Vietnam or Bangladesh will cost \$12 or less, making Indian products uncompetitive. When Mr. Trump launched the tariff war in April this year, his fury was directed mainly at China, which was charged with tariffs of 145%. But subsequently, the two countries agreed to cool off their animosities, and the U.S. tariffs on China have now come down to 30%. Astonishingly, India, a close U.S. ally, is now the country (with Brazil) threatened with the highest U.S. tariffs.

For India, the dollars it earns by selling textiles, pharmaceuticals, software services, and other products to the U.S. are critical for bridging the country's external trade deficit. Mr. Trump's tariffs may lead to job and income losses in India, at least in the short run. At the same time, in exchange for reducing tariffs, the U.S. is seeking greater access for its agricultural products, especially dairy, in the Indian market. This will in turn have adverse impacts on Indian farmers.

Nature of China's influence
The unfolding tariff war shows that low wages alone will not give a lasting competitive advantage to a country in the export market. China's strengths emerge from its enormous scale, massive infrastructure, and growing technological capabilities. China has established an unassailable lead in several industries. Its shares in global exports are 36.3% in textiles and clothing and 24.9% in machine and electrical equipment. The corresponding shares for India are 4.4% and 0.9% respectively (Table 2).

China's vice-like grip over large parts of the global production network and exclusive access to some critical materials such as rare earths may have quickened the melting of ice between it and the U.S. Moreover, further uncertainty and tariff escalations with other countries may derail plans by global companies to diversify their investments away from China and do more business with India and Vietnam.

If left with low wages as its only bargaining chip, India will remain on the periphery of global business, ever to be pushed by lower-cost suppliers and by the whims of tariff administrators of rich countries. Despite their early starts, India's IT and pharmaceutical industries tread unsteadily in low-value activities due to their underinvestment in research and development.

From producer to consumer
A significant source of demand for



THE GIST

Tariffs are the taxes levied on imports from other countries. The average tariff imposed by the U.S., the world's largest export market, was 2 to 3% for two decades until 2024.

The unfolding tariff war shows that low wages alone will not give a lasting competitive advantage to a country in the export market.

The U.S. administration will be wise enough not to underestimate India's strategic importance by factoring in only the relatively small size of its goods trade.

New routes: Activists of different trade unions burn an effigy of U.S. President Donald Trump to protest against the recent tariff hikes in Kolkata on August 13. AP

The tariff attack

Table 1: U.S. tariffs on selected countries

	U.S. tariffs (%), as of April 9, 2025	U.S. tariffs (%), as of August 11, 2025
India	26	50*
China	145	30
Vietnam	46	20
Bangladesh	37	20
Thailand	36	19
Pakistan	29	19

Note: This includes 25% penalty tariff, which will take effect on August 27, 2025.

Source: The New York Times

Table 2: Shares (in %) of these countries in global exports of selected products, 2022

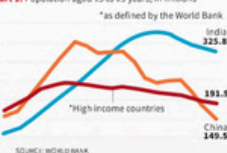
	China	U.S.	India
Textiles and clothing	36.3	3.5	4.4
Footwear	40.9	1.0	1.7
Metals	18.4	3.2	2.3
Chemicals	10.7	10.1	2.6
Machine and electrical equipment	24.9	7.0	0.9

Source: WITS (World Integrated Trade Solution), The World Bank

* The population of Indian immigrants in the U.S. rose from 0.3 million in 1982 to 3.2 million in 2023

China's vice-like grip over large parts of the global production network and exclusive access to some rare earth minerals may have quickened the melting of ice between it and the U.S.

Chart 1: Population aged 15 to 29 years, in millions



* as defined by the World Bank

Source: WITS (World Integrated Trade Solution), The World Bank

export-driven economic growth in China and other developing countries over the last few decades has been consumers in high-income countries in the West. However, the purchasing capabilities of developed countries have been going downhill for a while due to their ageing populations and growing inequalities. With rising tariffs and protectionism, the markets in the West will also be less open.

This means that future economic growth must be built around the demand from the home markets of countries such as India and China. The populations of these countries will have to transform themselves from being low-cost producers to producers and consumers simultaneously – from being servers left with only crumbs from growth to diners who occupy the high table of capitalist progress. Such a transformation can occur only with sweeping economic changes. Wages and incomes must rise quickly in India. High-value adding economic activities based on technology and knowledge must replace growth extracted exploitatively from labour.

The role of young India
Those who doubt Indians' ability to partake in growth derived from skills and

talent need only to look at the record of Indians in the U.S. over the past half-century. The immigration to the U.S. of engineers, doctors, and other professionals, most of them trained in India's public universities, has grown steadily since the 1970s. Approximately a third of the graduates from Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) migrated abroad, most of them to the U.S., through the 1970s and 1980s. The population of Indian immigrants in the U.S. rose from 0.3 million in 1982 to 3.2 million in 2023. Although it will only 1% of the U.S. population, Indian immigrants have a disproportionately higher representation in higher education and research and as entrepreneurs and corporate leaders. The brain circulation they set in has contributed to the U.S.'s continued global dominance in technology and innovation.

Today, one out of every five young people in the world lives in India. At a time when the youth population is declining not only in high-income countries but also in China, the multitude of its young will be India's trump card (Chart 1). Indians in the age group between 15 to 29 years and enrolled in secondary schools or colleges number

approximately 120 million, which is as big as the population of Japan. If accompanied by appropriate policy interventions to enhance their skills and training, these young Indians could become the movers and shakers in the emerging knowledge economy.

The U.S. administration will be wise enough not to underestimate India's strategic importance by factoring in only the relatively small size of its goods trade. If young Indians are turned away from the U.S. due to visa and job restrictions, the U.S. will be the bigger loser in the long run.

As the battle on trade and tariffs rages on, India's best defence will be its young people, their sheer numbers and the promise they hold. The home market they generate will be large enough to compensate for any dip in export earnings, provided jobs and incomes expand. Greater public expenditures on health and education, and a renewed focus by domestic businesses on innovation will be critical for unleashing the strengths of India's young as a shield against growing global turbulences.

Jayan Jose Thomas is a Professor of Economics at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi

How India's youth can challenge U.S. tariffs

Source: The Hindu Page Number: 10

GS-2: International Relations

GS-3: Economy

Context

In August 2025, the U.S. President announced that imports from India to the U.S. will be charged tariffs at 50%, impacting a range of Indian goods.

This move challenges India's trade competitiveness and economic diplomacy.

The article examines the role of India's demographic advantage—its large, youthful workforce—in countering the economic pressures from U.S. tariffs.

Summary of the Article

1. Tariffs & Impact:

- Tariffs are levies on imports; the new U.S. tariffs (50%) affect Indian goods like steel, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and IT services.
- India's export sector, already vulnerable, will face greater stress, particularly agriculture (soybean exports hit).

2. Global Trade Context:

- China's dominance in global supply chains and strategic minerals gives it stronger trade leverage compared to India.

3. India's Strength – Youth Advantage:

- India has the world's largest working-age population, with 1 in every 5 young people globally living in India.
- By 2050, while high-income countries and China will face ageing populations, India's youth bulge will continue to supply skilled labor.
- Skilled youth, if trained in STEM, digital economy, and high-tech sectors, can position India as a global economic player.

4. Policy Recommendations:

- Invest in higher education and vocational skills to harness demographic dividend.
- Use the youth workforce as a bargaining chip in trade negotiations.
- Focus on export diversification and domestic demand creation to reduce overdependence on U.S. markets.
- Strengthen India's technological base and innovation ecosystem to compete with advanced economies.

5. Policy Recommendations:

- Tariff barriers from the U.S. are an immediate challenge, but India's demographic dividend offers a long-term strategic counterbalance.
- With proper investment in youth skills and industries, India can reduce vulnerability and emerge as a key node in global trade networks.

Mains Question of the Day

High U.S. tariffs expose India's trade vulnerabilities. How can India's youth demographic be leveraged as a strategic asset in global trade? Discuss.
(150 words, 10 marks)



THIS WORD MEANS

BRAIN-EATING AMOEBA

Naegleria fowleri, which causes primary amoebic meningoencephalitis, which killed a child in Kerala



Life cycle stages of *N. fowleri*, seen under a microscope. Wikimedia Commons

SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUGUST 19

A DEADLY BRAIN-EATING amoeba has killed a nine-year-old child and infected two others including a three-month-old baby in Kerala's Kozhikode district in recent days. The infection, known as primary amoebic meningoencephalitis (PAM), is caused by a pathogen called *Naegleria fowleri*.

There have been fewer than 500 cases of PAM worldwide since 1965, though it has been reported in every continent except Antarctica.

The first case in India was reported in 1971, and the first case in Kerala in 2016. From 2016 to 2023, Kerala reported eight cases of PAM — but last year saw 36 cases and nine deaths. The fatality rate in Kerala has been much lower than the globally reported rate of 97%.

There have been eight confirmed cases and two deaths in the state so far this year. No obvious connection among the three recent cases has emerged as yet.

The pathogen

N. fowleri is a single-celled organism that lives in warm, fresh water and soils around the world, and thrives in high temperatures up to 46°C.

The amoeba is found in lakes and rivers, swimming pools, splash pads, surf parks, or other recreational venues that are poorly maintained or minimally chlorinated.

Human infection

N. fowleri enters the body through the nose, usually when people are swimming. It travels to the brain, where it destroys brain tissue and causes swelling.

A girl in Kozhikode was suspected to

have been infected while swimming in a local river in 2024; however, other children with her were not infected. Notably, *N. fowleri* infection cannot come from drinking water contaminated with the amoeba. PAM is non-communicable.

Symptoms of PAM

Symptoms in the initial stage include headache, fever, nausea, and vomiting. The patient may later experience a stiff neck, confusion, seizures, and hallucinations, and may slip into a coma.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most patients die within 1-18 days after symptoms begin.

Treatment for PAM

Scientists have not identified an effective treatment for the disease yet. PAM is usually treated with a combination of drugs including amphotericin B, fluconazole, azithromycin, rifampin, miltefosine, and dexamethasone.

Infection in Kerala

The first incident in Kerala was reported in Alappuzha in 2016, perhaps due to the large number of water bodies in the district. Since then, infections have been reported in Malappuram, Kozhikode, and Thrissur.

One reason for the detection of PAM cases in Kerala is the increased testing for acute encephalitis syndrome (AES), a condition that can be caused by various diseases, including PAM. Factors such as climate change and environmental pollution are also believed to play a part.

According to officials of the state health department, it is possible that the more recent cases were caused by a different category of amoeba.

Brain-eating amoeba

Source: The Indian Express Page Number: 15

GS-2: Health

GS-3: Science & Technology, Environment

Context

A deadly brain-eating amoeba (*Naegleria fowleri*) caused the death of a 9-year-old child and infected two others, including a three-month-old baby, in Kerala's Kozhikode district. The infection is called Primary Amoebic Meningoencephalitis (PAM).

- Fewer than 500 PAM cases worldwide since 1965, reported in every continent except Antarctica.
- India: first case in 1971; first Kerala case in 2016.
- Kerala (2016–2023): 8 PAM cases; 2023 alone saw 36 cases and 9 deaths. Fatality rate globally is 97%.
- Pathogen: *Naegleria fowleri* lives in warm freshwater, soil, lakes, rivers, swimming pools, poorly chlorinated recreational water. Thrives up to 46°C.
- Human infection: enters body via nose while swimming, reaches brain causing tissue damage. Not transmitted by drinking water; not communicable.



- **Symptoms:** headache, fever, nausea, vomiting, stiff neck, confusion, seizures, hallucinations, coma. Death usually within 1–18 days.
- **Treatment:** No definitive cure; experimental use of amphotericin B, fluconazole, azithromycin, rifampin, miltefosine, dexamethasone.
- **Kerala link:** First case in Alappuzha (2016); later in Malappuram, Kozhikode, Thrissur. Increased detection due to acute encephalitis syndrome (AES) testing. Climate change and pollution also possible factors.

UNSC debates future withdrawal of Lebanon peacekeeping force

Agence France-Presse
UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) began to debate on Monday a resolution drafted by France to extend the UN peacekeeping force in south Lebanon for a year with the ultimate aim to withdraw it.

Israel and the United States have reportedly opposed the renewal of the force's mandate, and it was unclear if the draft text has backing from Washington, which wields a veto on the Council.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson said "we do not comment on ongoing UN Security Council negotiations," as talks continued on the fate of the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL), deployed since 1978 to separate Lebanon



Armoured vehicles of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon patrol the Marjayoun area in southern Lebanon. AFP

and Israel.

The text, first reported by Reuters, would "extend the mandate of UNIFIL until August 31, 2026" but "indicates its intention to work on a withdrawal of UNIFIL".

That would be on the condition that Lebanon's government was the "sole provider of security in

southern Lebanon... and that the parties agree on a comprehensive political arrangement".

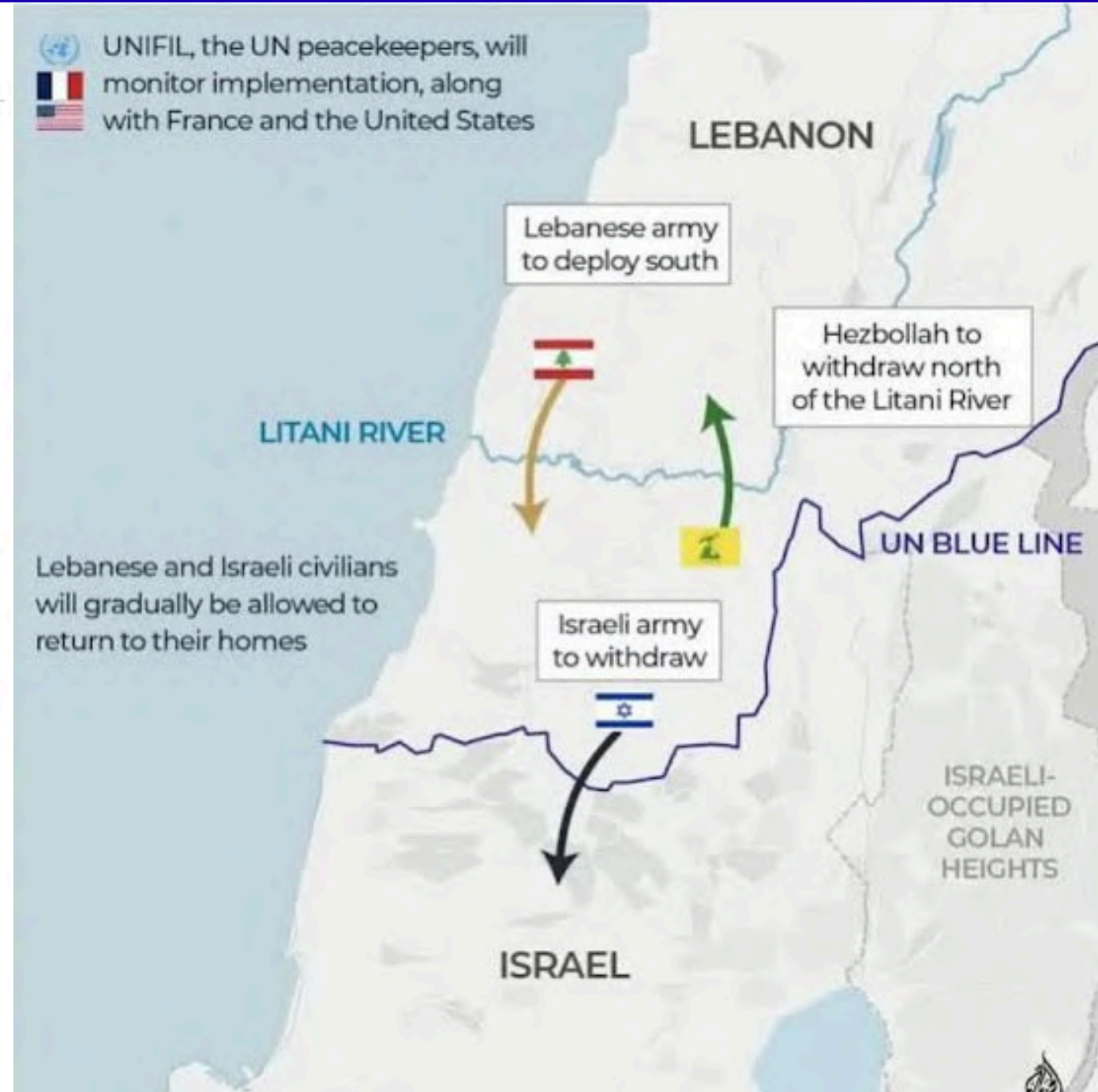
Under a truce that ended a recent war between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah, Beirut's army has been deploying in south Lebanon and dismantling the militant group's infrastructure there.

Lebanon has been grappling with the thorny issue of disarming Hezbollah, with the Cabinet this month tasking the army with developing a plan to do so by the end of the year. The Iran-backed group has pushed back.

Under the truce, Israel was meant to completely withdraw from Lebanon, though it has kept forces in several areas it deems strategic and continues to administer strikes across Lebanon.

Israel's forces have also had tense encounters with the UN blue helmets.

The draft resolution under discussion also "calls for enhanced diplomatic efforts to resolve any dispute or reservation pertaining to the international border between Lebanon and Israel".



UNSC debates future withdrawal of Lebanon peacekeeping force

Source: The Hindu Page Number: 15

GS Paper: GS-2 → International Relations

Context

- The UN Security Council has begun debating a France-drafted resolution to extend the UN peacekeeping force in south Lebanon (UNIFIL) for one year, with the ultimate aim of withdrawal.
- Israel and the U.S. oppose the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate, while France and other members back its continuation.
- Lebanon is grappling with disarming Hezbollah, while Israel maintains forces in strategic areas and continues cross-border strikes.

History of UN Peacekeeping in Israel-Lebanon

- **1978:** Following Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was created by UNSC Resolutions 425 & 426.
 - **Mandate:** Confirm Israeli withdrawal, restore peace/security, and assist Lebanon in regaining authority in the south.
- **2000:** Israel withdrew from south Lebanon; the Blue Line was drawn by the UN.

- **2006 (Israel-Hezbollah war):** UNSC Resolution 1701 expanded UNIFIL's mandate to monitor ceasefire, support Lebanese Armed Forces, and facilitate humanitarian aid.
 - Since then: UNIFIL has been patrolling, monitoring, and preventing escalation, though occasional clashes occur with both Hezbollah and Israeli forces.

About UN Peacekeeping Forces

- **Role:** UN Peacekeeping helps countries transition from conflict to peace by deploying multinational forces under UN mandate.
 - **Mandates:** Typically include monitoring ceasefires, protecting civilians, supporting political processes, assisting disarmament & demobilization, and facilitating humanitarian aid.
- **Structure:** Operates under the authority of the UN Security Council; troops are contributed by member states, but command lies with the UN.
- **UNIFIL (Lebanon):** One of the oldest UN missions (est. 1978). Currently includes around 10,000+ personnel from multiple countries.

Gender change: HC directs Manipur authorities to issue fresh academic certificates to transwoman doctor

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The High Court of Manipur has directed the heads of the State's education apparatuses to issue fresh academic certificates "under a new name and gender" for a female doctor who was born male.

Boboi Laishram underwent a gender reassignment surgery in October 2019 and the subsequent legal process to become Beoncy Laishram, a year after completing her MBBS. This made her the first doctor from the transgender community in the northeastern region.

She updated her Aadhaar, voter identity, and



Beoncy Laishram

Permanent Account Number cards, but struggled to get her name and gender changed in her academic certificates. This made her approach the High Court.

In an order on Tuesday, Justice A. Guneshwar Sharma ordered the authorities of the Board of Secondary Education Manipur (BOSEM), the Council of Higher Secondary Education Mani-

pur, the Manipur University, and the Manipur Medical Council to issue fresh educational certificates to Ms. Laishram.

The court did not find merit in the argument on behalf of the higher education authorities that any correction in the educational certificates has to start from the first institute, BOSEM in this case. The court was told that the Manipur University "has no objection in correcting the name and gender of the petitioner in the MBBS certificate" if the Class 10 and Class 12 certificates are updated first.

The educational heads were accordingly directed to provide Ms. Laishram with fresh certificates.

Gender change: HC directs Manipur authorities to issue fresh academic certificates to transwoman doctor

Source: The Hindu Page No.: 2

GS Paper: GS-2 → Social Issues

Context

- The High Court of Manipur directed state education authorities to issue fresh academic certificates under new name and gender to a transwoman doctor.
- Beoncy Laishram, who underwent gender reassignment in 2019, struggled to update her name/gender in academic records despite changes in Aadhaar and PAN.
- The court upheld her right to identity, making her the first doctor from the transgender community in the Northeast region.

Relevance in UPSC Mains

You can use this case in:

- GS-2 (Social Justice):



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What we UnderStand, We Conquer

20th AUG, 2025

- **Rights of Transgender Persons Act, 2019 – implementation and gaps.**
- **Role of judiciary in protecting fundamental rights (Articles 14, 19, 21).**
- **Issues of inclusivity in education, identity recognition, and social empowerment.**
- **Essay Paper: Topics on Gender Justice, Social Empowerment, Marginalized Communities.**
- **Ethics Paper (GS-4): Case study reference on empathy, dignity, equality, justice.**



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DAILY MCQs FOR PRACTICE

Q1. Recently, the Saltwater Crocodile population survey (2025) reported a significant rise in numbers in the Sundarbans. Consider the following statements:

1. Saltwater Crocodile is the largest living reptile species.
2. It is listed as Vulnerable under the IUCN Red List.
3. Sundarban Biosphere Reserve is the only natural habitat of Saltwater Crocodiles in India.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 1 and 2 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Q2. The recent debate around U.S. tariffs on Chinese goods is most closely linked with which of the following global economic concerns?

- a) Revival of Bretton Woods system
- b) Trade protectionism and economic nationalism
- c) Strengthening of WTO's dispute resolution mechanism
- d) Adoption of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)

Q3. Naegleria fowleri, sometimes seen in the news, is related to:

- a) Invasive plant species damaging wetlands
- b) Brain-eating amoeba causing rare infections
- c) Marine fish disease affecting coral reefs
- d) Bacterial outbreak leading to cholera

DAILY MCQs FOR PRACTICE

Q4. With reference to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), consider the following statements:

1. It was established in 1978 by the UN Security Council.
2. Its mandate includes monitoring the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon.
3. India has never contributed troops to UNIFIL.

Which of the above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Q5. The recent judgment of the Manipur High Court directing issue of fresh academic certificates to a transgender person is significant because:

- a) It is the first such order from any High Court in India.
- b) It upholds the right to identity under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.
- c) It allows retrospective application of gender identity in official documents.
- d) It extends reservation benefits of OBC category to transgender persons.

Answers

- 1 → b
- 2 → b
- 3 → b
- 4 → a
- 5 → b

