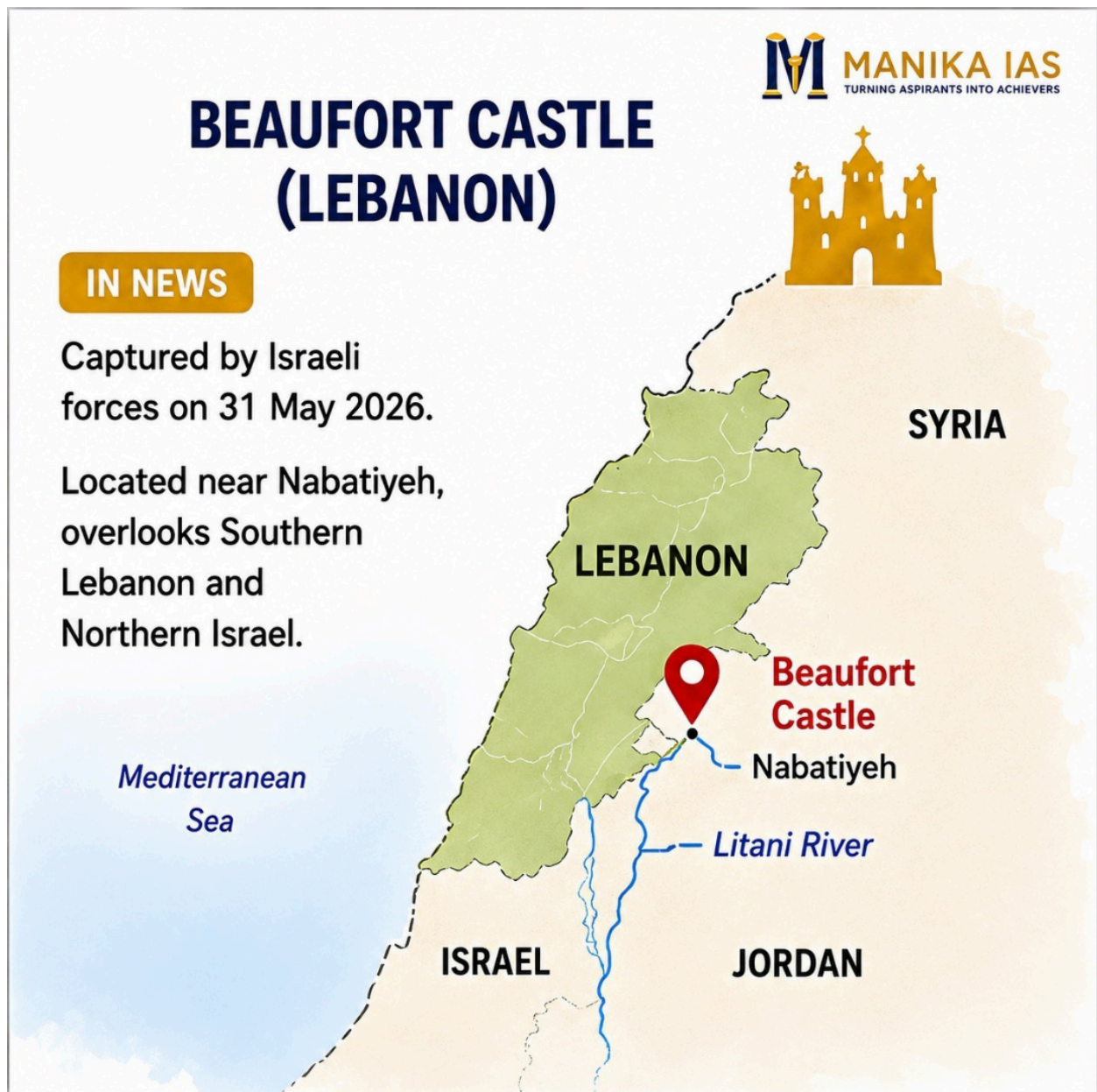


PLACES IN NEWS: WEEK 1

Topic 1: Beaufort Castle:

Context: Israeli Forces captured Beaufort Castle, perched at over 700 metres (3000 feet) above sea level near the city of Nabatiyeh in Southern Lebanon on 31st May 2026.



Key Points:

- Beaufort castle dominates Southern Lebanon from a high ridge near the border, giving whoever controls it a clear military view into both Lebanon and northern Israel.
- Its centuries-long history as a fortress and battlefield also makes it a powerful symbol in the Israel-Hezbollah conflict.
- Israel says it is targeting the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant Groups
- Israeli troops previously captured the castle in 1982 and held it until they withdrew from Lebanon in 2000.
- Israeli troops previously captured the castle in 1982 and held it until they withdrew from Lebanon in 2000.
- The Beaufort fortress, perched high atop Lebanon's rolling green hills and overlooking the Litani River, has been a strategic military asset for centuries. Built as a **Crusader castle around the 12th century on top of previous fortifications, it has also been used by Saladin's Jerusalem army, Mamluks, Ottomans, the French mandate, the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Israeli military until 2000**, when it was partially restored and opened to visitors

Topic 2: Strait of Hormuz and Musandam Peninsula

Context: The India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) officially came into effect on **June 1, 2026**.

Geographical Mapping (Prelims Focus):


- **Musandam Peninsula:** An exclave of Oman, physically separated from the rest of the country by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It juts into the Strait of Hormuz, giving Oman strategic control over the waterway's southern shipping lanes.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A critical maritime chokepoint connecting the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. Roughly 20–30% of the world's daily oil consumption passes through this narrow strait.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ

MANIKA IAS
TURNING ASPIRANTS INTO ACHIEVERS

IN NEWS



India–Oman FTA came into effect on 1 June 2026.




CONNECTS

Persian Gulf → Gulf of Oman
→ Arabian Sea

BORDERED BY

 → 
IRAN → OMAN



UPSC Relevance (GS Paper 2 & 3: International Relations & Economy):

- **Strategic Bypass:** Amidst geopolitical instability in West Asia, Oman serves as a highly secure gateway for India. The India-Oman CEPA allows Indian exporters to use Omani ports like **Sohar** and **Duqm** (which face the Arabian Sea/Gulf of Oman). This allows Indian trade to reach the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and East Africa by entirely **bypassing the vulnerable Strait of Hormuz chokepoint**.



- **Economic Integration:** The CEPA provides duty-free access to over 99% of India's exports. This heavily benefits labor-intensive MSME sectors like textiles, agriculture, and engineering goods.



MUSANDAM PENINSULA



OVERVIEW

Musandam Peninsula is a strategic enclave in the northwest of Oman, separated from the rest of Oman by UAE territory.



STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

- Controls the Strait of Hormuz – one of the world's most important maritime choke points.
- Key for maritime security and monitoring in the Arabian Gulf.
- Vital for trade and energy routes.



ADMINISTRATION

Part of Oman and administered by the Musandam Governorate.



GEOGRAPHY

- Rugged mountainous terrain.
- Fjords (Khor) and deep inlets.
- The highest peak, Jebel Harim, rises to about 2,087 meters.



Musandam Peninsula enhances Oman's strategic depth and strengthens its role in regional security and maritime trade.

Topic 3: Myanmar & Regional Connectivity

Geographical Mapping (Prelims Focus):

- **Rakhine State:** A coastal state in western Myanmar facing the Bay of Bengal. It hosts the **Sittwe Port**, the starting point of India's Kaladan Project.
- **Kachin State:** Myanmar's northernmost state, sharing borders with China and India (Arunachal Pradesh). It is highly prone to insurgency (Kachin Independence Army) and is rich in jade and timber.

Infrastructure & Connectivity Projects (Mains Focus - GS 2 & 3):

Project	Route	Strategic Significance for India
Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport	Kolkata (Sea) → Sittwe Port (Rakhine) → Kaladan River (Inland Water) → Paletwa → Mizoram (Road)	Creates an alternative route to India's Northeast, circumventing the vulnerable Siliguri Corridor ("Chicken's Neck").
IMT Trilateral Highway	Moreh (Manipur) → Tamu → Mandalay (Myanmar) → Mae Sot (Thailand)	A physical manifestation of India's "Act East" policy, aimed at integrating India's Northeast with ASEAN economies.

7

MOREH TO MAE SOT (IMT HIGHWAY)

India–Myanmar–Thailand
Trilateral Highway

- Moreh (India)
- Tamu
- Mandalay
- Myawaddy
- Mae Sot (Thailand)



IMPORTANCE



Trade



Connectivity



ASEAN
Integration

One of the most important
mapping routes for UPSC.

6 RAKHINE STATE & KALADAN PROJECT
Western Myanmar

MANIKA IAS
TURNING ASPIRANTS INTO ACHIEVERS

KEY LOCATIONS

- Sittwe Port
- Kaladan River
- Paletwa

KALADAN ROUTE

- Kolkata (by sea)
- Sittwe (by river)
- Paletwa (by road)
- Mizoram

WHY IMPORTANT?
Provides alternate access to Northeast India.

Remember: Sittwe Port is located in Rakhine State.

Security Concerns: Persistent internal conflict in Rakhine (Arakan Army) and Kachin severely delays these infrastructure projects. It also poses border management challenges for India, leading to recent decisions to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and suspend the Free Movement Regime (FMR).

Topic 4: Mudumalai Tiger Reserve

Context: Following beneficial recent rainfall in June 2026, the lush vegetation within the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve has successfully attracted herds of deer to the expansive open grasslands.



Geographical & Ecological Facts (Prelims & GS 3 Focus):

- **Location:** Situated in the Nilgiris District of Tamil Nadu, right at the tri-junction of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala.

- **Biosphere Context:** It is a critical component of the **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve** (India's first biosphere reserve).
- **River System:** The **Moyar River** flows through the reserve, acting as a natural boundary separating Mudumalai from Bandipur National Park in Karnataka.
- **Vegetation:** Highly diverse due to varying rainfall gradients—ranging from tropical evergreen and moist deciduous forests to dry deciduous scrub and open grasslands (like the Moyar valley where the deer gather).
- **Fauna:** High density of Bengal tigers, Asian elephants, and Gaurs. Deer species include Chital (spotted deer), Sambar, and Barking deer.
- **Conservation Update:** The reserve and its fringes (like Kalhatti) are critical habitats for vultures. In June 2026, forest officials had to recapture a radio-tagged, captive-bred white-rumped vulture in this region to help it acclimatize.