



NAMAN SHARMA
IAS ACADEMY

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1. SC status 'only for Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs'

Why in the News?

The Supreme Court of India recently ruled that the Scheduled Caste (SC) status is exclusive to persons professing Hinduism, Buddhism, or Sikhism. In the case of Chinthada Anand vs. State of Andhra Pradesh, the Court held that conversion to any other religion (specifically Christianity or Islam) results in the immediate and complete loss of SC status from the moment of conversion. The judgment reaffirmed the strict interpretation of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, dismissing a plea by a Christian convert who sought protection under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Identity question

The top court said that a person professing a religion other than those mentioned in Clause 3 cannot be part of a scheduled caste

■ Clause 3 of the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, mandates that 'no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste'

■ The Sikh religion was added to the ambit of Clause 3 in 1956

■ The provision was further amended in 1990 to include persons professing Buddhism

■ The top court observed that the bar in Clause 3 is 'categorical and absolute'



Background

- **Constitutional Framework:** The Constitution of India, under Article 341, empowers the President to specify castes, races, or tribes deemed to be Scheduled Castes in a state. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, initially limited SC status to Hindus.
- **Amendments via Presidential Orders:** Through subsequent amendments (1956 and 1990), the benefits were extended to Sikhs and Buddhists, acknowledging that these religions historically shared the social stigma of caste-based untouchability despite their doctrinal rejection of it.
- **The Petitioner's Case:** Chinthada Anand, born into a Hindu Madiga (SC) community, converted to Christianity to become a pastor. He filed a complaint under the SC/ST (PoA) Act, 1989, alleging caste-based attacks and slurs.

- **High Court Ruling:** The Andhra Pradesh High Court quashed the proceedings, ruling that since Anand professed Christianity, a religion that does not recognise caste, he could not claim the protections afforded to SCs.

Key Features of the Supreme Court Judgment

- **Strict Interpretation of Clause 3:** The Bench invoked Clause 3 of the 1950 Order, which states that “no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of a Scheduled Caste.” The Court held that this bar is “categorical and absolute.”
- **Meaning of ‘Profess’:** The Court clarified that ‘profess’ implies a public declaration and outward manifestation of faith, not merely private belief. It was observed that Christianity’s theological foundation does not incorporate the institution of caste.
- **Loss of Status:** Conversion to any religion other than Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism leads to an immediate and complete loss of SC status, irrespective of birth or continued social stigma.
- **Conditions for Re-conversion:** For converts seeking to revert to Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism, the Court laid down a three-pronged test:
 - Proof of Caste: Clear proof of the original caste.
 - Bona Fide Reconversion: Credible evidence of genuine reconversion.
 - Acceptance: Satisfactory evidence that the original community has accepted and assimilated the individual back into the fold.
- **Distinction from STs:** The judgment noted a distinction for Scheduled Tribes (STs). Unlike SCs, the ST Order (1950) does not prescribe a religion-based exclusion. However, if a tribal member abandons tribal customs and assimilates into another religion’s practices, their tribal identity becomes a factual question to be determined at trial.

Challenges

- **Continuity of Social Stigma:** A key criticism is that caste is a social reality, not merely a religious one. Converts often continue to face caste discrimination, untouchability, and social ostracism even after conversion. Denying them legal protection ignores the persistence of caste-based violence.
- **Violation of Article 25 (Freedom of Religion):** Critics argue that the judgment indirectly penalises religious conversion. The fear of losing constitutional protections (reservations and legal safeguards) acts as a coercive element, potentially violating the fundamental right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion.
- **Erosion of Legal Safeguards:** By excluding Christian and Muslim converts from the SC/ATROCITIES Act, the judgment creates a vulnerable class of citizens who, despite belonging to historically oppressed communities, are left without statutory protection against caste-based atrocities.
- **Ambiguity in ‘Re-conversion’ Proof:** The strict conditions laid down for re-conversion (especially the requirement of “acceptance” by the community) are difficult to prove in practice, leaving room for legal ambiguity and potential misuse.

Way Forward

- **Legislative Intervention (Parliament):** Since the 1950 Order is a Presidential Order under Article 341, only Parliament can amend it. There is a long-pending demand to include Christian and Muslim Dalits in the SC net, based on the Ranganath Misra Commission report. The government must consider a constitutional amendment to delink SC status from religion.

- **Harmonising Articles:** There is a need to balance Article 17 (Abolition of Untouchability) with Article 25 (Freedom of Religion). The state must recognise that caste is a secular social evil. Legal protection should follow the person based on their social origin, not their current religious identity.
- **Sub-categorisation within SCs:** While addressing the religion issue, the government should also consider the demand for sub-categorisation of SCs to ensure that benefits reach the most marginalised among the Dalit communities, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's judgment is a reaffirmation of the existing legal position based on the Constitutional Orders of 1950 and subsequent amendments. While it provides legal clarity on the strict interpretation of the law, it exposes a significant socio-legal paradox: the persistence of caste-based discrimination against converts who are constitutionally denied the safeguards meant to combat that discrimination.

2. Trump discusses Strait of Hormuz, conflict in West Asia during call with Modi

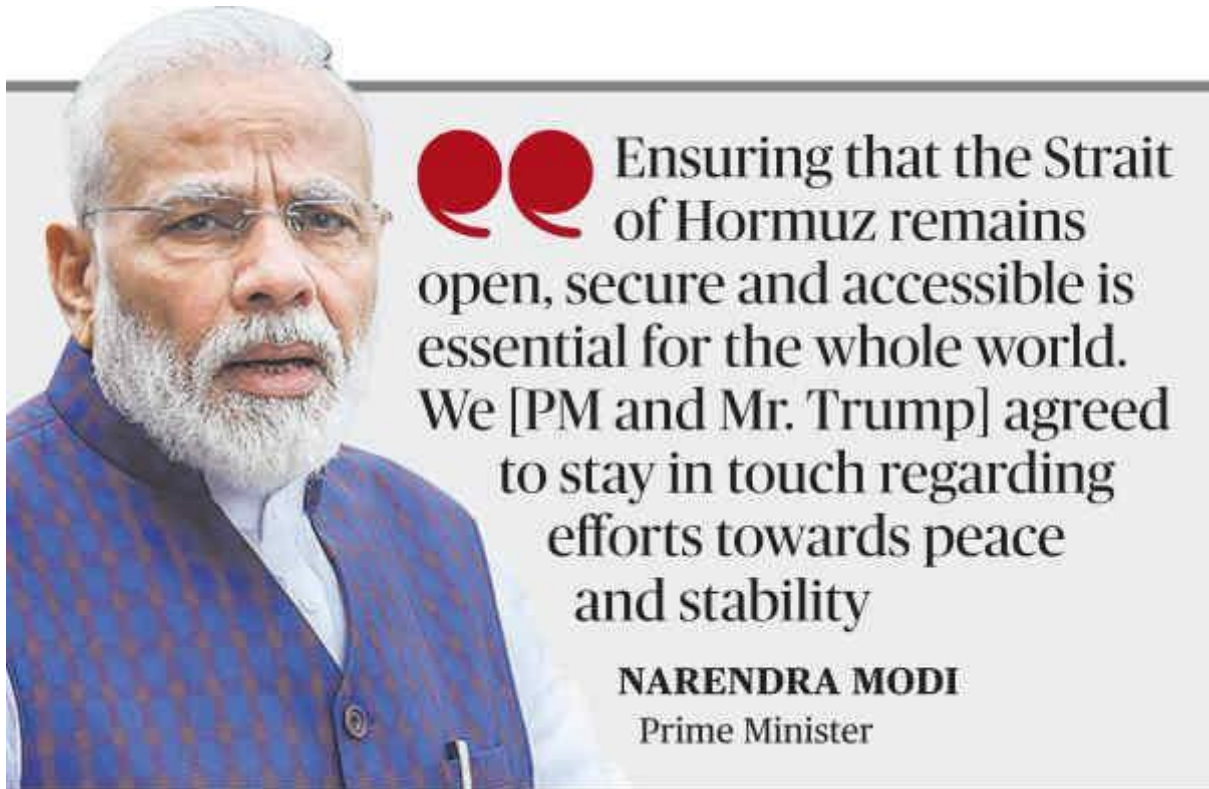
Why in the News?

U.S. President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi held their first telephonic conversation since the eruption of the recent conflict in West Asia (February 28 onward). The discussion focused on the Strait of Hormuz, the escalation of hostilities involving the U.S., Israel, and Iran, and the resulting impact on global energy supplies. This call is significant as it marks high-level diplomatic engagement amid a crisis that threatens India's energy security and the safety of its diaspora.

Background

- **Context of the Conflict:** The recent West Asian tensions escalated after the U.S. and Israel conducted strikes on Iran's energy hubs, prompting Iranian retaliatory strikes on energy targets across the region. This has reignited fears of a wider regional war.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** Located between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, this is the world's most critical oil chokepoint. Approximately 20-25% of global oil consumption passes through this strait. For India, it is a maritime lifeline, through which nearly two-thirds of its crude oil imports and a significant portion of its Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) transit.
- **India's Stakes:**
 - Human Cost: The conflict has resulted in the deaths of at least six Indian nationals.
 - Energy Security: Disruptions have led to volatile crude prices and uncertainty in LPG availability.
 - Diplomatic Balancing: India maintains a strategic partnership with the U.S. while having historically close ties with Iran (Chabahar Port) and energy dependencies on Russia.
- **Bilateral Context:** Before the war, India and the U.S. were negotiating a bilateral trade pact. However, talks were paused following the outbreak of hostilities. The U.S. had

previously imposed punitive tariffs on India for purchasing Russian oil, but has recently relaxed these sanctions to stabilise global energy markets.



Features of India's West Asia Policy

- **Strategic Autonomy (Non-alignment 2.0):** India continues to avoid taking sides in the U.S.-Iran-Israel rift. While engaging with the U.S. as a strategic partner, India has not severed ties with Iran, viewing it through the lens of connectivity (INSTC, Chabahar) and energy.
- **Energy Security as a Priority:** India's foreign policy in West Asia is heavily driven by energy needs. The government has leveraged the U.S. policy shift on Russian oil to secure affordable crude, demonstrating pragmatism in crisis management.
- **Diaspora Protection:** With over 9 million Indians residing in West Asia, ensuring their safety during escalations is a core component of India's foreign policy.
- **Multi-Alignment:** India is simultaneously balancing ties with Israel (defense and technology), Iran (connectivity), and the Arab Gulf states (energy and remittances), while managing the expectations of the U.S. as a major strategic partner.

Challenges

- **Energy Price Volatility:** The conflict threatens to spike global crude prices. As the world's third-largest oil importer, any sustained disruption in the Strait of Hormuz could widen India's current account deficit (CAD), depreciate the rupee, and fuel inflation.
- **Maritime Security Threats:** The Strait of Hormuz is a potential flashpoint. Any blockade or military engagement in the strait directly threatens India's energy supply chains and requires a robust naval presence (Indian Navy deployment) to safeguard commercial vessels.
- **Diplomatic Tightrope:** India faces the challenge of maintaining its "strategic autonomy." Supporting the U.S. line too overtly could jeopardise ties with Iran (critical for

access to Central Asia via Chabahar), while opposing the U.S. could strain the Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership.

- **Trade Deal Uncertainty:** The paused bilateral trade deal with the U.S. remains in limbo. The geopolitical divergence over West Asia could further delay negotiations aimed at resolving tariff disputes.

Way Forward

- **Diplomatic Engagement:** India must leverage its unique position as a "bridge" between the West and the Global South. It should continue using platforms like the Voice of the Global South Summit to advocate for a ceasefire and dialogue, while maintaining back-channel communications with all stakeholders.
- **Diversifying Energy Sources:** To reduce vulnerability in the Strait of Hormuz, India must accelerate its energy transition towards renewables (solar, wind) and diversify oil imports. Strategic partnerships with Russia (Far East), the U.S., Guyana, and Africa should be deepened to reduce reliance on a single volatile region.
- **Strengthening Maritime Security:** India should enhance its naval presence in the Gulf region and strengthen the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and regional maritime security frameworks to ensure freedom of navigation.
- **Reviving the Trade Pact:** India should delink trade negotiations from geopolitical conflicts where possible. Resuming the bilateral trade agreement with the U.S. would provide economic stability and strengthen the strategic partnership without compromising India's independent foreign policy stance.

Conclusion

The Trump-Modi call highlights the critical intersection of geopolitics, energy security, and bilateral relations. While India has successfully navigated past West Asian crises by maintaining strategic autonomy, the current conflict presents heightened risks due to its direct targeting of energy infrastructure and the involvement of major powers. India's ability to keep the Strait of Hormuz open is not merely a diplomatic objective but a necessity for its economic survival.

3. Iran, Israel trade strikes despite Trump's claims of talks with leadership in Tehran

Why in the News?

The news is in the spotlight because a direct military exchange between Iran and Israel has escalated, pulling in regional actors like Lebanon, Syria, and the Gulf states. This escalation occurs despite US President Donald Trump's claim of ongoing talks with Tehran, which Iran has denied. The conflict threatens global energy supplies, international shipping (via the Strait of Hormuz), and risks turning the ongoing shadow war into a full-blown regional conflagration.

Background

- **Historical Context:** Israel views Iran's nuclear program and its support for militant groups (Hezbollah, Hamas) as an existential threat. Iran views Israel as an illegitimate entity and supports the "Axis of Resistance" to counter Israeli and US influence.

- **Immediate Trigger:** The article notes that Lebanon was pulled into the war when Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on March 2. This followed earlier escalations, including alleged Israeli strikes on Iranian diplomatic facilities in Damascus and Iran's unprecedented direct missile/drone attack on Israeli territory in April 2024.
- **The Trump Factor:** Former President Trump's administration had previously pursued a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran (withdrawing from the JCPOA nuclear deal). The article highlights a contradiction: Trump's self-imposed deadline regarding the Strait of Hormuz and his claim of talks versus the reality of escalating military action.

Feature

- **Direct State-on-State Strikes:** Unlike the previous "shadow war" (attacks on ships or via proxies), the current conflict involves direct Israeli airstrikes on Iranian soil and Iranian missile attacks on Israeli cities like Tel Aviv.
- **Multi-Front Conflict:** The war is no longer confined to Iran and Israel.
 - Lebanon: Hezbollah is actively engaged.
 - Gulf States: The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain have been targeted or affected by shrapnel and drone attacks, indicating the conflict is engulfing the entire West Asia region.
- **Economic Warfare:** Iran's chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz (a chokepoint for 20% of the world's oil) is being used as leverage. This has led to skyrocketing fuel prices and threats to the global economy.
- **US Involvement:** While the US denies active negotiations (according to Iran), the deployment of "thousands more US Marines" signals high-stakes military readiness.
- **Target Selection:** Strikes are targeting critical infrastructure facilities, power plants (Isfahan), and urban centres (Tel Aviv)-signalling a shift from military targets to economic and civilian-impacting infrastructure.



Challenges

- **Lack of Trust & Denial:** There is a fundamental credibility gap. While the US claims talks are ongoing, Iran denies it. This makes any potential negotiation fragile from the start.
- **Authority to Negotiate:** It is unclear who in Iran's complex power structure (the government vs. the Supreme Leader) has the authority to negotiate. Israel's policy of assassinating key leaders (military commanders, nuclear scientists) further destabilises the Iranian decision-making apparatus.
- **Divergent Objectives:**
 - US: Wants to curb Iran's ballistic missile program and nuclear ambitions.
 - Iran: Seeks relief from sanctions and regime survival.
 - Israel: Vows to continue targeting leaders and preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, even if it means bypassing US diplomatic efforts.
- **Proxy Complexity:** The involvement of non-state actors (Hezbollah, Houthis) with high military capability makes it difficult to contain the conflict. Any miscalculation could lead to uncontrollable escalation.
- **Humanitarian Toll:** With over 1,500 dead in Iran and casualties across Israel, the West Bank, and Gulf states, the humanitarian cost is mounting, creating domestic pressures on the governments involved.

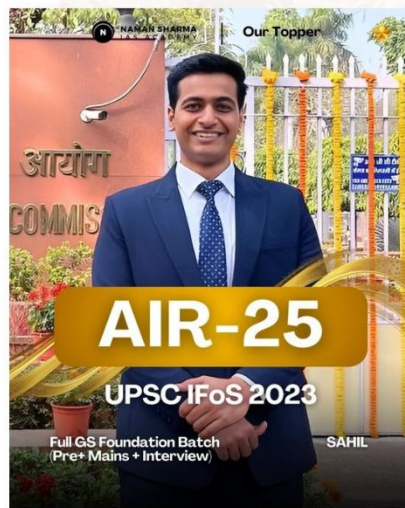
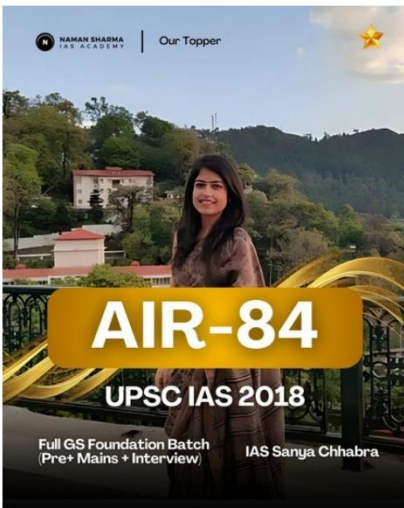
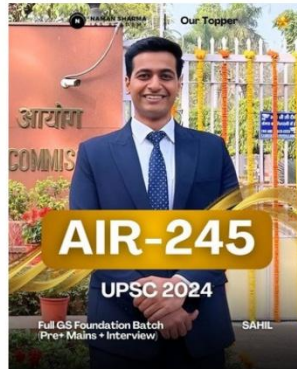
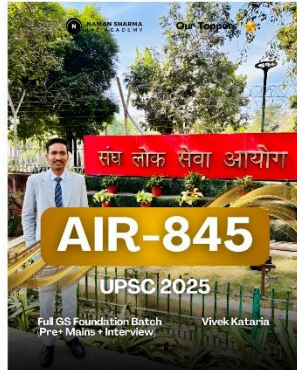
Way Forward

- **Diplomatic Mediation:** Pakistan's offer to host talks is a viable third-party route. However, any successful mediation would require a neutral guarantor (possibly China or Russia, though the US remains a key player).
- **Re-establishing Communication Channels:** Given the denial of talks, a back-channel communication mechanism between Tehran and Washington is critical to deconflict military operations (especially regarding US troops in the Gulf).
- **De-escalation in the Strait of Hormuz:** The international community (through naval coalitions like CMF or EMASOH) must work to secure the waterway without provoking Iran further, ensuring global energy supplies remain stable.
- **Nuclear Diplomacy:** Reviving a framework like the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) or a "less-for-less" interim agreement is essential to freeze Iran's nuclear program in exchange for limited sanctions relief, creating space for broader security talks.
- **Containment of Proxies:** Regional powers (Saudi Arabia, UAE) who have recently normalised ties with Israel (via Abraham Accords) must use their leverage to urge restraint from the US and Israel to prevent the conflict from spilling over their borders.

Conclusion

The current Iran-Israel conflict represents a dangerous inflexion point where the shadow war has transitioned into a direct war. The contradiction between diplomatic overtures (Trump's claims) and military aggression (strikes and counter-strikes) highlights the instability in West Asia. Despite the high tempo of attacks, neither side likely desires a full-scale war that would devastate their economies (Iran) or result in mass casualties (Israel). However, the involvement of the US, the chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz, and the multi-front activation of proxies create a volatile environment where miscalculation is highly probable. The way forward hinges on whether the US and Iran can align their military actions with their claimed diplomatic intentions before the conflict spirals into an uncontrollable regional war.

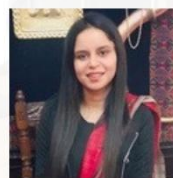
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