ASI launches conservation works on the upper rampart (wall) of the Brihadeeswarar (Big) Temple, Thanjavur

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News

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has launched conservation works, estimated at ₹59 lakh, on the upper rampart (upper wall) of the Big Temple (Brihadeeswarar / Rajarajeshwaram), Thanjavur – a UNESCO World Heritage site (Daily Thanthi, 18 Oct 2026). Reason: roots of plants and creepers growing on the wall penetrate the gaps between stones and weaken the structure; rainwater stagnation also damages the old masonry. Vegetation is being removed, damaged portions repaired and a 'brick jelly concrete' coat applied – following archaeological conservation norms without altering the monument's original character.

Key facts

Work	Conservation of the upper rampart – ₹59 lakh; Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)
Reason	Plant and creeper roots entering stone joints; rainwater stagnation
Temple	Brihadeeswarar / Rajarajeshwaram / Big Temple – Rajaraja Chola I, 1003–1010 CE
Architect	Kunjara Mallan Raja Raja Perunthachan
Vimana	About 66 m (216 ft); entirely granite; Dravidian style

UNESCO	1987 – Thanjavur; 2004 – Gangaikonda Cholapuram & Darasuram added → 'Great Living Chola Temples'

Background

- History: Built by Rajaraja Chola I (985–1014 CE), the temple is also called 'Dakshina Meru'; completed in 1010 CE, it marked its 1,000th year in 2010. The vimana over the sanctum is taller than the gopurams – unlike later Tamil temples where gopurams dominate. The fortified walls around the temple are believed to have been added in the 16th century.
- Architecture: the complex spans about 40 acres with two rectangular prakarams; a huge monolithic Nandi at the entrance; Chola-period murals and Tamil inscriptions on Chola administration.
- Body & law: Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) – founded 1861 by Alexander Cunningham; under the Union Ministry of Culture, HQ New Delhi. Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958 – 2010 amendment: 100 m 'prohibited area' around a monument, next 200 m 'regulated area'; created the National Monuments Authority (NMA).
- UNESCO group 'Great Living Chola Temples': Brihadeeswarar, Thanjavur (Rajaraja I); Brihadeeswarar, Gangaikonda Cholapuram (Rajendra I, Ariyalur district); Airavatesvara, Darasuram (Rajaraja II, near Kumbakonam).

Tamil Nadu link: the 'Sathaya Vizha', held at the Thanjavur Big Temple on Rajaraja Chola I's birth star (Sathayam in the month of Aippasi), has been celebrated as a Tamil Nadu Government function since November 2022. All three temples of the UNESCO group lie in Thanjavur and Ariyalur districts.

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