Supreme Court on Karthigai Deepam – Deepathoon Row, Thiruparankundram

Prelims : *Current events of National and International Importance | Polity / Governance*

Why is in news?

On 27 November 2026, the Supreme Court directed that the **Karthigai Deepam** *be lit at the Deepathoon stone pillar atop Thiruparankundram Hill, Madurai, on 28 November.*

- The Court also issued show-cause contempt notices to officials and temple authorities, suspended the **temple Board of Trustees** and appointed two former judges as receivers.
- The lamp was lit at Deepathoon at 5 pm on 28 November under court-appointed supervision.

Background of the issue

- The dispute concerns the location for lighting the ceremonial Karthigai Deepam on Thiruparankundram Hill in Madurai, Tamil Nadu.
- On 20 November 2026, the Supreme Court made a one-time interim arrangement permitting a restricted, temple-authorised team to light the lamp at the stone pillar identified as Deepathoon on 24 November, subject to safeguards.
- The order expressly clarified that the one-time arrangement did not recognise or enforce any asserted customary, religious or proprietary right.
- It left open questions relating to title, possession, customary usage, religious entitlement, temple administration and access to the site.

Supreme Court's order dated 27 November 2026

- The Court found prima facie wilful disobedience of its 20 November order and directed the receivers to ensure that the Deepam was lit at Deepathoon on 28 November.

- It issued show-cause notices to the concerned officials and temple authorities, asking why contempt proceedings should not be initiated. A notice is not a final finding of contempt.
- The Board of Trustees of Arulmigu Subramaniaswamy Temple was suspended; former judges Justice S. Vaidyanathan and Justice V. Parthiban were appointed as receivers to take charge of temple administration.
- The Court directed the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to take over security of the temple and the hill, citing failure of local authorities to implement its earlier order.
- The Court directed that the lamp-lighting arrangements maintain a distance of 50 metres from the Sikandar Dargah on all sides, with security and public-order safeguards.
- The Court directed the receivers to permit devotees to light lamps at designated places subject to conditions and security considerations.

Constitutional provisions involved

- **Article 144**: All authorities, civil and judicial, in the territory of India shall act in aid of the Supreme Court.
- **Article 129:** The Supreme Court is a Court of Record and has the power to punish for contempt of itself.
- Article 25: Freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, health and other provisions of Part III.
- Article 26: Freedom of religious denominations to manage their own affairs in matters of religion, subject to public order, morality and health.
- Article 14: Equality before law and equal protection of laws; relevant to non-arbitrary public administration.
- **Contempt of Courts Act, 1971**: Provides the statutory framework for civil and criminal contempt.

Governance and federal dimensions

- Rule of law: Court orders bind public authorities and institutions; compliance is central to constitutional governance.
- Judicial enforcement: Article 144 requires authorities to act in aid of the Supreme Court.
- Religious freedom and public order: The case involves balancing religious observance, public safety and the protection of multiple places of worship.
- Administrative accountability: The suspension of the temple board and

appointment of receivers illustrate judicial intervention in the administration of a public religious institution in the context of alleged non-compliance.
- Important distinction: The interim directions on lamp lighting did not finally decide the historical custom, title, possession or essential religious practice questions.

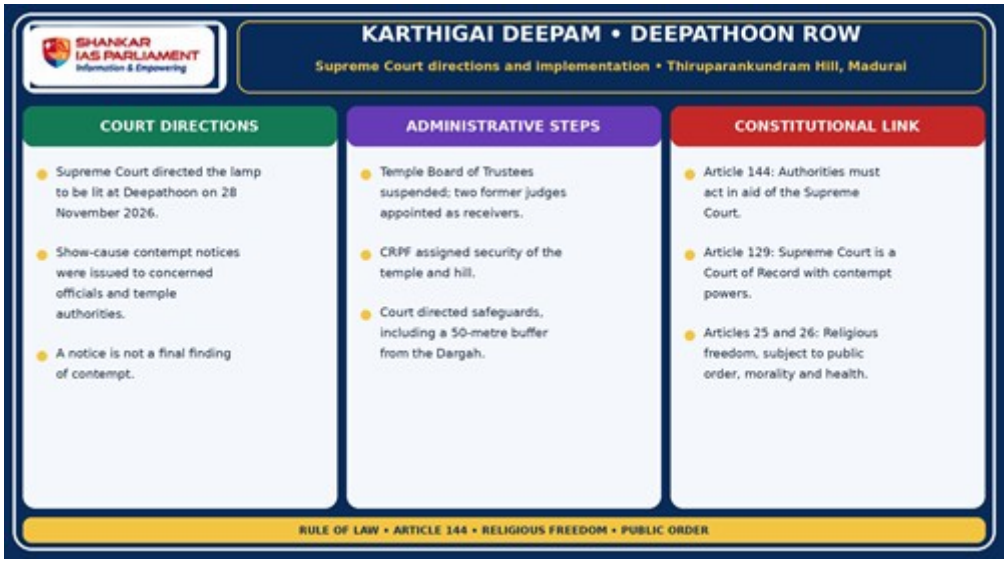
Latest development

- The Karthigai Deepam was lit at Deepathoon at 5 pm on 28 November 2026 in the presence of court-appointed receivers and under CRPF security.
- The flame reportedly extinguished on its own at around 7.55 pm; this does not alter the fact that the ceremony was carried out pursuant to the Court's direction.
- The Supreme Court proceedings were listed for a further update on 12 December 2026.

Prelims watch-outs

- Article 144 – Authorities to act in aid of the Supreme Court; Article 129 – Supreme Court as Court of Record.
- Contempt notice / show-cause notice is not equivalent to a final conviction for contempt.
- Interim arrangement ≠ final adjudication of customary or proprietary rights.
- CRPF is a Central Armed Police Force under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Infographic | Supreme Court directions and constitutional provisions



Reference

[The Indian Express | Deepathoon row: Supreme Court suspends temple board, orders lamp lighting]

