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Kerala unveils plan to 'recreate' Silk Route

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The Kerala government on Friday unveiled the Spices Route Initiative in the presence of the ambassadors of 29 countries on the erstwhile spices circuit. Part of the Muziris Heritage Project, the initiative attempts to create a model similar to the Silk Route.

The meeting, which was organised by the Kerala government along with UNESCO, brought to the table the ambassadors in an attempt to share expertise and information.

Muziris, a major port town situated on the banks of the Periyar river between the 1st century BC and 4th century AD, went off the world commercial map in 1341. A flood or earthquake, which changed the course of the river, is thought to be behind the town's slide in fortunes.

For long, it was thought that present-day Kodungallur was Muziris. However, recent archaeological findings suggest that Pattanam, an area within 10 km of the Cochin airport, could have been the Muziris of old.

Everything about the meeting — the ambassadors, the scale of the project— seemed to suggest that the Heritage Project has grown into a much larger idea. "The project encompasses eight panchayats and two municipalities. It covers an area of 150 sq km. The first phase will be ready in two years' time," said Benny Kuriakose, project consultant. About Rs 90 crore is expected to be spent on the project.

Apart from the restoration of Muziris, the project attempts to capture the historical importance of the surrounding areas. About 75 sites of historical importance and 25 museums are proposed to be developed alongside.

Kerala's Education Minister M A Baby said the heritage project would be an opportunity to teach schoolchildren about Kerala's history. "We are already working with some schools to facilitate visits. We have also signed an MoU with the School of Archaeology, Oxford University to permit them to use information coming out of Muziris as part of a study," said Baby.

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