



BLAST FROM THE PAST METROPLUS

Blast from the past



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Architect Benny Kuriakose shares his passion for conservation

Delving into the past has led to numerous exquisite discoveries. One such person who has dug deep and discovered archival treasure is architect Benny Kuriakose, one of the members of the Muziris Heritage Project. Sharing his passion at Max Mueller Bhavan recently, Kuriakose talked about Muziris, an ancient port in Kerala that disappeared in the 14th century.

The port is believed to have been situated near the town of Kodungallur in Kerala. "Thomas Isaac, the Finance Minister of Kerala, gave funding for the excavation of Muziris in 2006. The port is marked in a fourth century map, which is presently at the Vienna Museum," Kuriakose said.

Talking about the excavation, Kuriakose talks about the port being a key entry point for three religions to India – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He also mentioned the oldest mosque, synagogue and European monument – the Pallikoodum Fort in India was built in Muziris in 1503.

"The recreation of Muziris is linked with development plans that would be in favour of the local community. This project does not aim at attracting tourism, but to uplift and benefit the natives of the region," Kuriakose points out.

"We have prevented house boats in this area as we want water taxis to flourish and all the legislations were taken with the consent of locals," adds Kuriakose.

He also spoke about the manner in which the project has focussed on environmental, social and economic sustainable development "Four museums have been opened to the public and many more museums are being planned to showcase the colonial history of Kerala," he says.

Speaking of the market revitalisation project that is supposed to revive the local market culture in Kerala, Kuriakose said, "In a market in Kottapuram, close to the site, we discovered that only 40 per cent of the shops were functional. In order to encourage shopkeepers and revive traditional style of trading we built make-shift spaces, with lights and public toilets," he claims. Kuriakose said the Centre for Muziris Studies has been set up with an auditorium, library and classrooms to promote research and academics. "Heritage is a resource for us and not a liability."