

# Let toddy business fizz up: panel report

**Classy outlets will replace shacks if govt accepts suggestions by toddy panel**

Staff Reporter

**KOCHI:** A makeover could be round the corner for the Rs. 1,800-crore-a-year toddy business in the State if the government decides to rope in the tourism department to run classy toddy outlets and the excise department decides to replace rundown shacks with permanent shops.

These recommendations are part of the interim report by the committee appointed by the government in early January to look into problems

facing traditional toddy business.

The committee also recommended setting up a toddy business development corporation to give it a rudder.

The panel, headed by Excise Commissioner Anil Xavier, looked into the future of toddy business and the prospects of tapping neera, the unfermented sap from coconut flowers, as a solution to the crisis facing coconut farmers in Kerala.

The committee will submit its interim report on Thursday after it was initially allowed two months of time from January. The committee has since then sat four times to discuss the problems confronting toddy business.

The report has spotlighted the need to give toddy business, which has been frozen in time, a leg-up.

Over 5,000 toddy shops in the State sell around seven



*The interim report by the committee has spotlighted the need to give the toddy business, which has been frozen in time, a leg-up. — PHOTO: H. VIBHU*

lakh litres of toddy a day when the actual production is estimated to be only around five lakh litres. At an average of Rs. 60 a litre, toddy — spu-

rious or otherwise — is a business worth nearly Rs. five crore daily in the State.

The interim report pointed out that one of the biggest

problems facing the business was the lack of permanent buildings for toddy shops. Since toddy shops are allotted through tenders for a period

of one year each, the winners of the tender are forced to renew rentals or even take new buildings on lease every year. This made rentals expensive and most often unaffordable, the interim report said.

However, this problem may be overcome if the current tendering system is changed and toddy shops are awarded for a minimum period of three years. The interim report also suggested the possibility of the department of excise establishing permanent set-ups for toddy sales.

The report called for a uniform system of toddy supplies to shops across Kerala. At present bulk of the toddy sold in the State is tapped in the Chittoor taluk of Palakkad district and brought to all other districts, excluding Kannur, on the basis of permits issued by the excise department.