

Cabinet nod for neera production

Government clears committee report on proposal

FOR BETTER GOVERNANCE

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The Cabinet has approved a proposal to permit production of neera (sweet toddy or palm nectar) from coconut.

Announcing this after a Cabinet meeting here on Thursday, Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said that two units each would be permitted initially in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, and Pathanamthitta districts and one each in other districts. Each unit would have 1,000 coconut trees under them for tapping. Extension of production would be considered after evaluation of the results.

The Chief Minister said the government had set up a committee to study a proposal to permit making of neera and approved its report. The concerns of toddy workers had been addressed through talks.

Autonomous colleges

Mr. Chandy said the Cabinet had also approved the details of its earlier decision to permit autonomous colleges in the State. Autonomous colleges would have academic freedom, intend-

ed to provide them new opportunities and facilitate starting of new courses. Autonomy would be granted after consideration of applications from colleges if they fulfilled specified criteria.

Referring to the concerns expressed by some quarters, the Chief Minister clarified that the wage and service conditions of the staff would not be affected by change in status of the college. The direct payment system for private colleges would continue. However, the government would not bear any financial burden relating to new courses started by them.

Road accidents

The Cabinet decided to appoint retired High Court judge T.K. Chandrasekhar Das as commission to probe road accidents, including the recent ones in Malappuram and Kozhikode districts, and submit its recommendations. The term of the commission would be six months. The families of those killed in the recent bus accident at Perinthalmanna would be given Rs.3 lakh each. The injured will get assistance ranging from Rs.5,000 to Rs.25,000.

The Cabinet also decided to enhance the procurement price of paddy from Rs.17 to Rs.18 a kg. It sanc-

tioned Rs.155.89 crore for maintenance of roads to Sabarimala.

It approved the proposals for resolving the issues regarding pensions to the staff of the Regional Cancer Centre here. Accordingly, the contributory pension scheme will apply to new recruits from April this year. For others, a special pension scheme would be introduced using a corpus from the Employees' Provident Fund and a contribution of Rs.34 crore from the government.

The Cabinet granted 10 cents near Vikas Bhavan here to the Baby John Foundation. About 48 cents would be given to the Adoor municipality to build a town hall.

An additional 2.73 acres would be given for starting a Kendriya Vidyalaya at Kanhagad. Ten acres at Wadakkancherry would be given to the Cooperative Academy for Professional Education. It also allocated 50 cents for the Fire and Rescue Services station at Nattika.

It cleared a proposal to confirm contingent workers at the Energy Management Centre as office attendants. The promotional quota of office attendants as junior assistants would be increased from five to ten per cent.