

# CM calls meet to end war over neera

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
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Chief Minister Oommen Chandy has called a high level meet on Wednesday to sort out the differences of opinion existing between the ministers for Excise and Agriculture which is threatening to jeopardise the prospects of the fledgling neera industry in the state.

Apart from the ministers, the empowered committee on budget proposals headed by chief secretary with additional chief secretary (finance), agricultural production commissioner and Taxes Secretary as members will also attend the meet.

Additional chief secretary (finance) Dr K M Abraham told DC that the meet was called to ensure that the proposals in this year's budget to help the



**Left:** Excise minister K. Babu and Agriculture minister K P Mohanan

neera industry are followed up from the beginning of the financial year.

"There was no money earmarked in the last year's budget but the case is different this year," he said. "This is one of the seven flagship projects of the government this year."

The chief minister's attempt seeking a truce



between his warring ministers comes in the wake of the coconut farmers, who looked up to neera as a saving grace, taking to the streets pressing their demands.

The war broke out when Agriculture Minister K P Mohanan wanted the defunct Kerala State Coconut Development Corporation to get prefer-

ence in the projects related to neera but the chief minister and the Excise minister under whom the programme now runs wanted the coconut producer cooperatives to get help.

The war resulted in the ₹15 crore earmarked for coconut producer companies for neera processing last year getting lapsed. The budget for this fiscal has doubled the grant to ₹30 crore—₹15 crore as grant for CPCs and ₹15 crore for training neera technicians.

The government which has till now issued 173 licenses to coconut producer federations has virtually stalled the process of issuing further licenses, pushing the future of CPCs which set up neera processing plants into darkness for want of raw material.