

Excise sits on neera licence renewal

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KOCHI, APRIL 6

The State government which virtually stalled the growth of the neera industry in the state by refusing to issue fresh licences now appears to smother whatever is left of it. The excise department is sitting on the applications by coconut producer federations (CPFs) which have applied for the renewal of licenses for the financial year 2015-16.

The government had last year issued 173 licenses to CPFs which were to be



renewed every financial year. Given that the licenses were issued only to the farmer's federations organised by the Coconut Development Board, there should ideally be no delay in their renewal.

CDB sources said it had sent letters to the government in March recom-

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mending their renewal. It is mandatory for the federations to have a valid licence to tap neera.

Chairmen of the coconut producer companies which depend on neera produced by the federations said the applications for renewal were forwarded to the department in time. "We got the assurance that it

will be issued soon," said chairman of a CPC. "But we do not understand the delay." When contacted, Excise Minister K. Babu said the issue was not brought to his notice.

"I shall direct the department to renew the licences immediately," he told *Deccan Chronicle*.

Meanwhile, the fight between the agriculture and excise ministries has resulted in the farmer producer companies losing ₹15 crore sanctioned in the last year's budget as investment subsidy.

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Kochi: The agriculture ministry, which is the administrative ministry through which the money was to be made available to the companies, refused to process the file despite the special working group of the finance ministry asking it to include it in the supplementary demand for grants. K Shajahan, chairman of the Consortium of Coconut Producer Companies in Kerala, a grouping of neera processing companies, said the Consortium has decided to support the hartal, called by fishermen and farmers, in protest against the government's negative attitude towards neera companies.