

# Stakeholders to discuss report on neera prospects today

Staff Reporter

**KOCHI:** A meeting being convened by the Minister for Excise K. Babu in the State capital on Tuesday to discuss the recommendations of a committee, which studied the prospects of tapping and marketing neera, is expected to forge a consensus among industry stakeholders on how to go about the business, that has raised the prospect of generating at least Rs. 5,400 crore of additional income annually.

The meeting is being convened in the background of a high-level committee, headed by the State excise commissioner, recommending

that there was no hurdle to opening up tapping and marketing of neera, the unfermented sap from coconut flowers, provided it was done under firm supervision.

The committee said in its report that neera tapping could be done by federations of coconut producer societies, registered and controlled by the Coconut Development Board (CDB) or by cooperatives of toddy workers but the committee called for separate processing units for neera and toddy and delinking the sale of the two products from coconut palms.

The Coconut Develop-

ment Board, which is strongly lobbying for opening up the neera business, has said that the over 40 lakh coconut farmers in the State have not been given a hearing in the din of claims over neera playing spoilsport with the toddy business.

The chairman of the board T.K. Jose says that the only problem that neera business faces today is the lack of trained technicians for tapping the sap.

Trade unions have raised apprehensions that toddy tappers will lose jobs if neera production is permitted. On the contrary, neera tapping opens up a great oppor-

tunity for generating employment in the rural areas, he said. K.M. Sudhakaran, president of the Kerala Kallu Chethu Thozhilali Vyavasayi Federation, CITU, however, claimed on Monday that neither the

KAU nor the CDB had demonstrated whether neera tapping and sales would be practical.

N. Azhakesan, president of the Desiya Kallu Chethu Vyavasaya Thozhilali Federation (INTUC) is open to

the idea of opening up the neera business. He warned against ditching traditional toddy tappers and workers in the name of the new business. These are the issues that will come up for discussions at the meeting.