

CM: Unwanted Controversies Hinder State's Development

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Kottayam: Lashing out against the 'anti-development forces', Chief Minister Oommen Chandy has said the state has cut a sorry figure in the sphere of development even as projects functioning successfully in other states are faltering here on account of being marred by unwanted controversies.

"The sea plane project, which had been inaugurated with high expectations has turned out to be a huge shame for us. While it was deliberately made a non-starter here, sea planes are as common a sight as canoes in Maldives," Chandy said.

He was speaking after launching the Neera project, jointly begun by the Coconut Development Board and the Excise Department, here on Sunday.

"Sand has today become a rare material after it was constantly associated with corruption and the mafia. We have huge wealth of sand in our seawater. However, the attempts to mine the sea sand have been disrupted in the name of environment conservation. Our shores are rich with mineral wealth. But this too cannot be made use of due to unwanted debates," the CM added.

The Chief Minister clarified that the Neera project

will be implemented only after considering the interests of the toddy tappers. "The government will issue more licences to manufacture Neera. The sum of ₹15 crore, which has been allocated in the last budget for the project, will be spent fully on the sector. A decision in this regard will be taken on Tuesday and the chairman of the Coconut Development Board has been authorised for this," he said.

Excise Minister K Babu, who presided over the function, lauded the Chief Minister giving a new lease of life to the Excise Department. The CM presented the licence to the coconut federa-

tions for manufacturing Neera.

Minister K Babu launched the variants of cakes and toffees, two value-added products made from Neera, while Forests Minister Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan distributed the certificates to technicians who completed the training. K Suresh Kurup MLA distributed the awards to the best technicians on the occasion. Kottayam municipal chairman M P Santhosh Kumar, Excise Commissioner Anil Xavier, Industrial Department principal secretary P H Kurian and Kerala Agricultural University Vice-Chancellor P Rajendran spoke on the occasion.