

State nod to produce Neera on experimental basis

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Thiruvananthapuram:

After much dilly-dallying, the state government has decided to grant sanction to produce Neera, a sweet juice from coconut tree, on an experimental basis.

The decision was taken at a meeting convened by excise minister K Babu here on Tuesday that was attended by various stakeholders, including the trade unions.

"A decision has been taken to grant permission to produce Neera, which will be on an experimental basis. The production will be undertaken at one unit in each district in a cluster of 1,500 coconut trees," Babu told TOI.

In the districts where there are no takers for toddy shops on lease -- Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and Pathanamthitta -- the production of Neera will be undertaken at two units.

The permission to extract Neera will be given only to those federations and companies, which are affiliated to Coconut Development Board.

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IN A NUTSHELL

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ting up a Neera-Toddy board for protecting the interests of toddy labourers are being considered and a study will be undertaken by taxes secretary to make recommendations in this regard," the minister said.

The UDF government had declared in its manifesto that it would give sanction to commercial production of Neera in the state. On January 15, 2013, the government had constituted a nine-member committee headed by excise commissioner Anil Xavier to suggest measures to revive the sinking toddy business in the state and ways to tap Neera from coconut trees that could turn out to be a prosperous business for coconut farmers in the state, especially when the price of coconut is falling far below

the remunerative levels.

For allowing the commercial extraction of Neera, the government needs to make necessary amendments in the Abkari Act, in which toddy -- which comes under the category of liquor -- is defined as fermented or unfermented juice extracted from coconut tree, date palm, etc.

Though Neera, which is a juice prior to the fermentation, has no alcohol content in it, the excise department still holds control owing to the fact that it comes under the definition of liquor as per the definition given in the act. While Karnataka has already begun the commercial extraction of Neera in two districts, Maharashtra and Goa are already in the business.