

Govt plan to produce Neera on commercial basis turns stale

K P Sai Kiran | TNN

Thiruvananthapuram: The much-awaited programme to produce Neera, a coconut water-based soft drink, on commercial basis may be delayed as the panel set up to make recommendations in this regard has sought extension of its tenure. According to sources, the committee which met in the first week of February has decided to seek six-month extension. The nine-member panel headed by excise commissioner Anil

Xavier was to submit the report before March 15, prior to the announcement of next year's Abkari policy and the state Budget.

Though the UDF had declared in its election manifesto that it would allow coconut farmers to produce and sell Neera, a non-alcoholic beverage with high commercial value, the government has been dragging its feet on the matter due to various compulsions.

"We hope that the permission to extract Neera can be an-

nounced in the Abkari policy for the next year. But before that, we need to get the report of the committee," said excise minister K Babu. For allowing the commercial production of Neera, the government needs to amend the Abkari Act, in which toddy that comes under the category of liquor, is defined as fermented or unfermented juice extracted from coconut tree, date palm etc. Though Neera is non-alcoholic, the excise department still holds control of it.