

Giving a Professional Touch to Coconut Climbers

by Chandrakanth Viswanath

T'Puram: Don't be surprised if you see men in blue, akin to the Indian cricket team, arriving in two wheelers to climb coconut trees, in a few months.

They are members of the Friends of Coconut Tree (FOCT) an initiative formed by the Coconut Development Board (CDB) which achieved its target of enrolling 5,000 climbers on March 2, 2012, four weeks before the deadline.

"FOCT will get a blue uniform including t-shirt, pants and cap in the coming months. Each person would get a pair of uniform," CDB chairman T K Jose told Express. "The same blue colour of the Indian cricket team is expected to give them social acceptability in a quick manner," he said.

FOCT aimed at training persons between the age group of 18 and 50 irrespective of gender, for harvesting and plant protection operations of coconut trees. It started on Chingam 1 (August 17, 2011) in 13 districts of Kerala, Lakshadweep and Maharashtra and it aimed at 5,000 members by March 31, 2012, in 31 weeks. But it crossed the numbers on March 2 in the 27th week itself. But the women mem-



FOCT	
Thiruvananthapuram	588
Kozhikode	591
Ernakulam	569
Kannur	507
Malappuram	491
Kollam	451
Palakkad	417
Thrissur	402
Alappuzha	284
Kasargod	200
Kottayam	157
Idukki	132
Pathanamthitta	100
Lakshadweep	101
Maharashtra	20
Total	5010

bers are less than 30 per cent of the expected share from the fairer sex.

Capital district topped the list with 588 members. Though it is aimed at developing a batch of 500 members in ten major coconut growing districts of Kerala, only three other district-

Kozhikode, Ernakulam and Kannur- achieved this number. (see box) Wayanad was omitted from the free training session but many from the district participated in the sessions held in Kozhikode district.

Kottayam, Idukki and Pathanamthitta are the other districts which kept away from the project in the first stage, joined it with a minimum participation.

Lack of mobility is a problem faced by members of FOCT, now. So, CDB has sent a proposal to allow 25 per cent subsidy for two-wheelers worth Rs 50,000 for the members.

A batch with minimum of twenty members for six days would cost CDB, Rs 68,500 along with Rs 2,100 for a machine. As it was started in August, the funds for FOCT were diverted from other resources of CDB.

Taking a cue from the success it received in Kerala, many other states have come forward to try this initiative. "Karnataka will be the first state to start this after Kerala. But unlike Kerala, they want it confined only in three districts, Mysore, Mandya and Chamarajanagar. Tamil Nadu also has approached us to train at least 1,000 persons as FOCT immediately," said Jose.