

Plucker monkey? Not a nutty idea

**NADEESH
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Monkeys may soon pluck coconuts in the state as they do in Sri Lanka or South East Asia. A proposal for using monkeys to pluck coconuts will soon be presented to the government by two agriculture officers.

This will be part of the steps being initiated or contemplated by the Coconut Development Board (CDB) that has already introduced mechanised climbing of the trees, and has even formed collective workforces called *Chengathikootam*.



A monkey plucking coconuts in Sumatra, Indonesia.

As the state is facing a serious shortage of coconut

tree climbers, many farmers are now showing a disinterest in the cultivation of coconut. Hence, the initiatives.

Agriculture deputy director K. R. Vijayakumar and principal agriculture officer V.K. Raju have mooted the 'monkey plan', as also the proposal for the setting up of a training centre for monkeys with the help of the faculty from Indonesia or Thailand. "It is like the training that's given to wild elephants for picking logs," says Vijayakumar.

Instructions begin with simple tasks such as spinning a coconut on its stem and learning to pluck it.

They can be trained to distinguish the ripe ones from the unripe and how to retrieve coconuts from the ground and load them onto trucks. A competent monkey can climb up to 500 coconut trees a day, when a human being can do no more than 40-50, he says.

The government and the board have been looking at alternatives like mechanised climbing equipment, including robots, for plucking coconuts, to overcome the scarcity of tree climbers. Even a college was established in Kozhikode to train men climb coconut trees, but it also failed to achieve its goal.