A mainstream Ayurvedic pain therapy has been given a north-eastern twist with betel leaf and Naga Chilli, one of the hottest on earth.

The hot experiment based on an acupuncture theory by Imlikumba Jamir, the sole Naga panchakarma specialist in India, has been approved by the Ministry of AYUSH.

Panchakarma, entailing five procedures, is the purification therapy used in Ayurvedic medicine while AYUSH expands to Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa and Homoeopathy.

Naga Chilli (Capsicum chinense), also known as King Chilli, is more popular as Bhot Jolokia, which derives its name from the popular belief that it originated in the hills of Bhutan.

The Guinness Book of World Records had in 2007 named it as the hottest chilli but lost its position first to a U.K. variety called Infinity and then the U.S.-developed Carolina Reaper.

Mix and match: Imlikumba Jamir has used local substitutes to make the mix economical and effective.

Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara College of Ayurveda in Hassan, Karnataka.

The 32-year-old from Nagaland’s Mokokchung, now a medical officer at the North Eastern Institute of Folk Medicine in Pasighat, did his masters in Panchakarma from Shri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara College of Ayurveda in Hassan, Karnataka.

Dr. Jamir replaced the primary ingredient, common chilli, in the traditional paste with the Naga Chilli and added betel leaf for its astringent property. The other ingredients - garlic, ginger, rock salt and sesame oil - remained the same.

“The idea was to use easily available local substitutes and in the right proportion to make the paste least expensive and most effective. I used the paste on 10 people and only one, a woman, complained of irritation. The paste is now being administered only after a skin test to ascertain if a person is not allergic to the pungency of the hot mix,” he said.

Room for improvement
The higher degree of pungency compared to the traditional mix, Dr. Jamir explained, makes the nutrients penetrate deeper to particular tissues that need to be stimulated for pain relief.

“Itching in one case aside, all the 10 patients were relieved of pain considerably with a reduction in swelling. The result has been encouraging, but there is room for further clinical trials,” he said.