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NIIST moots a proposal to set up a novel Centre for Phytochemicals and Ayurveda

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: In a novel initiative, CSIR- National Institute of Interdisciplinary Science and Technology (NIIST) has mooted a proposal to set up a new 'Centre for Phytochemicals and Ayurveda' at its campus in Pappanacode. The proposal awaits central nod soon.

"The proposal to set up the new Centre for Phytochemicals and Ayurveda at NIIST here has been submitted to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). The aim of setting up such an institute to scientifically validate and improve the efficacy of Ayurvedic products for health care and of medicinal value. Though prepared from natural herbs and medicinal plants, scientific trials and validation can check even the minimal side effects that any medication can cause," CSIR-NIIST director Dr A Ajayaghosh told TOI. It is intended to test the efficacy of phyto-chemicals or chemical compounds extracted chemicals from the natural plants before releasing an ayurvedic product.

Pegged at an estimated project cost of Rs 25 crore, the new Centre proposed will be an interdisciplinary project pooling in the scientific knowledge of existing centres at the institute including chemical sciences, bio-tech, life sciences, natural and agro-processing, he said.

"Once we get the nod from our parent CSIR, we will also approach other funding agencies including Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Department of Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH)," he said. It requires funding to construct a separate building, infrastructure, research facilities and for manpower, he said.

The new Centre proposed will help in quality control with technology up-gradation, modernisation and value-addition of Ayurveda products. The process for that has already begun with the support of existing centres at the institute, mainly with agro-processing and technology and the new centre planned will be a full-fledged, he said.

NIIST Agro-processing and Natural products division head and chief scientist MM Sreekumar told TOI that from an ingredient pepper, its aqueous extracts are taken for preparing Ayurvedic medicines and the resulting spent raw material is a rich source of active ingredients like piperin which are not water soluble. These can be effectively isolated and value realized which in turn will bring down the cost of the Ayurvedic preparations. In another case, certain preparations are ground for 90 days to achieve certain characteristics like fineness and by scientifically establishing the parameters like particle size, suitable machinery can be identified to have the same desired effect in a much faster way.

The latest in NIIST scientific support for modernisation and validation of ayurvedic products is the tie-up with the company Sreedhareeyam ayurvedics. He indicates that it was following the success of NIIST technology in modernising the commercial processing facility of Brahmin's Food Products Private Ltd by creating a breakfast mix unit that rolled out delicacies such as puttu or steam cakes effectively at a faster pace compared to traditional mechanised modes.