

Indian state to hunt for 'life-saving' mythical plant

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A northern Indian state will soon begin a multi-million dollar search in the Himalayas for a mythical plant believed to hold life-saving properties, a local minister said Thursday.

Uttarakhand will spend 250 million rupees (\$37 million) of state money hunting the herb Sanjeevani Booti, which is credited in the ancient Hindu text Ramayana with restoring life to the brother of a god.

While many wild [plants](#) with medicinal properties grow in the Himalayas, there is scant evidence that the plant ever existed, with sages and modern researchers failing for centuries to find it.

"We have to try and it will never go to waste. If we are determined we will certainly find it," Surendra Singh Negi, the state's minister for alternative medicine, told AFP.

The minister said the search will focus on the Dronagiri range of Himalayas near the Chinese border, one mountain of which is mentioned in the epic Ramayana as being the site where the magical herb grows.

"We have set an initial budget of 250 million rupees (\$37 million) for the project," Negi said.

Scientists will start work in August, the minister said, adding that the central government has refused to fund the project.

Ancient texts say the plant has life-restoring properties, grows in the high mountains of the Himalayas and glows in the dark.

According to Ramayana, the monkey god Hanuman was tasked by the god Rama with fetching the herb after a healer said it would cure his dying brother Laxman.

But Hanuman failed to identify the plant, instead uprooting the entire mountain and carrying it thousands of miles to treat the mortally injured prince during a war with demons in what is now Sri Lanka.

India's 5,000-year-old medicine system Ayurveda uses herbs to cure ailments and has seen a revival under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

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