

U.S. House votes to declassify intelligence on origins of COVID pandemic



U.S. House of Representatives on Friday unanimously voted to declassify information on possible links between the Wuhan Institute of Virology and the COVID-19 pandemic, sending the bill to President Joe Biden.

The Senate also voted unanimously earlier this month to require Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines to declassify such information, CNBC reported.

COVID first emerged in Wuhan, China, in 2019, though it's still unknown how the virus spread to people. Scientists have clashed for years over whether COVID came from an infected animal that transmitted the virus to humans, or whether the pathogen escaped from a lab in Wuhan.

The effort by Congress to declassify intelligence on the origins of COVID comes after the Energy Department concluded with "low confidence" that the virus most likely escaped from a lab in Wuhan as the result of an accident.

The Energy Department is one of 18 agencies that make up the U.S. intelligence community. The department was previously undecided on how the virus emerged.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has also concluded that the pandemic likely started with a lab incident in Wuhan, the agency's director, Christopher Wray, told Fox News earlier this month.

"The FBI has for quite some time now assessed that the origins of the pandemic are most likely a potential lab incident in Wuhan," Wray told Fox News. "Here you are talking about a potential leak from a Chinese government-controlled lab."

"I will just make the observation that the Chinese government, it seems to me, has been doing its best to try to thwart and obfuscate the work here, the work that we're doing, the work that our U.S. government and close foreign partners are doing. And that's unfortunate for everybody," Wray said.

Biden ordered the intelligence community in 2021 to provide an updated analysis of how the pandemic emerged. The intelligence agencies were divided on how COVID started spreading among humans, though they said a natural original and a lab leak were both plausible.

Iran's wheat production increased 28% in 2022

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that 13 million tons of wheat were produced in Iran in 2022, over 28 percent more compared to 10.1 million tons in 2021.

The quarterly global Crop Prospects and Food Situation report's forecast for 2023 production remains the same at 13 million tons, according to Mehr News Agency.

Despite the solid rise in output, last year's production was slightly below the five-year annual average of 13.2 million tons, the report added.

According to FAO, Iran is among the world's major producers of wheat.

China is by far the world's biggest producer with 134.8 million tons in terms

of the five-year annual average production.

India, Russia, the US, Canada, Australia, Ukraine, Pakistan, Turkey and Argentina follow before Iran with estimated outputs of 105.6, 82.2, 48.7, 31.3, 27.4, 26, 25.6, 19.4 and 18.4 million tons respectively.

Kazakhstan with 13 million tons comes after Iran.

Notably, the report considers the European Union as one producer, which tops the list with a five-year annual average production of 138.6 million tons.

Global production of grain was estimated at 794.6 million tons in 2022, up from 778 million tons in 2021.

The 2023 forecast and the five-year annual average global production were put at 784 and 764.3 million tons respectively.

Scientists have developed a blood test for anxiety



Researchers have developed a blood test to determine a person's risk of developing anxiety, while also providing insight into its current severity and best course of treatment.

The test, based on biomarkers strongly associated with the mood disorder, can also predict if a person is likely to get more anxious in the future and how other things, like changes in hormones, might affect their anxiety, according to a research published in Mo-

lecular Psychiatry.

And now that the team, led by researchers from the Indiana University School of Medicine, has validated the test, the startup MindX Sciences is already creating the blood tests for physicians to use.

"Many people are suffering from anxiety, which can be very disabling and interfere with daily life," says psychiatric neuroscientist Alexander Niculescu from Indiana University School of Medicine.

"Having something objective like this where we can know what someone's current state is as well as their future risk and what treatment options match their profile is very powerful in helping people."

This recent study made use of techniques that members of the team developed in earlier research, leading to the creation of blood tests for depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, and pain.

Testing blood samples is a convenient, objective way to learn about what's going on in our bodies and brains. Diagnoses that rely heavily on self-reporting or observing behaviors can be challenged by difficulties in communication or variations in symptoms. By measuring quantities of a protein, enzyme, hormone, or some other molecule strongly associated with a condition, specialists have one more tool to make an informed decision.

PIC OF THE DAY



Gillyflowers, or common stock (*Matthiola incana*), are biennials native to southwestern Europe and western Asia. It is one of the most important species used by the floral and horticultural industries. Iran's Khomeyni Shahr in Isfahan Province produces 13 million gillyflower pots every year, leading the production of the amazing plant in the country.

● KHADIJEH NADERI/MEHR NEWS AGENCY



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Mouse or deer? One of the world's smallest ungulates, the lesser mouse deer typically reaches weights of only 4.4 lbs (2 kg)—about the size of a chihuahua. Unlike many other deer, it has no horns. Instead, males rely on fang-like canine teeth to defend themselves from foes.

4:34 PM · Mar 11, 2023



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"When I finish the training, I want to be a great fashion designer," says 24-year-old Ami in Côte d'Ivoire. Ami didn't finish school due to her family's financial issues. Thanks to a UNICEF-supported programme, she is now learning skills to help her achieve her dreams.

12:30 PM · Mar 11, 2023



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Despite progress, gender disparities persist in access, skills and the quality of education. Learn more in the 2023 #HerEducationOurFuture factsheet. <https://on.unesco.org/3ZHe2bW>

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