Newsletter

A vision of Latin America and the Caribbean countries

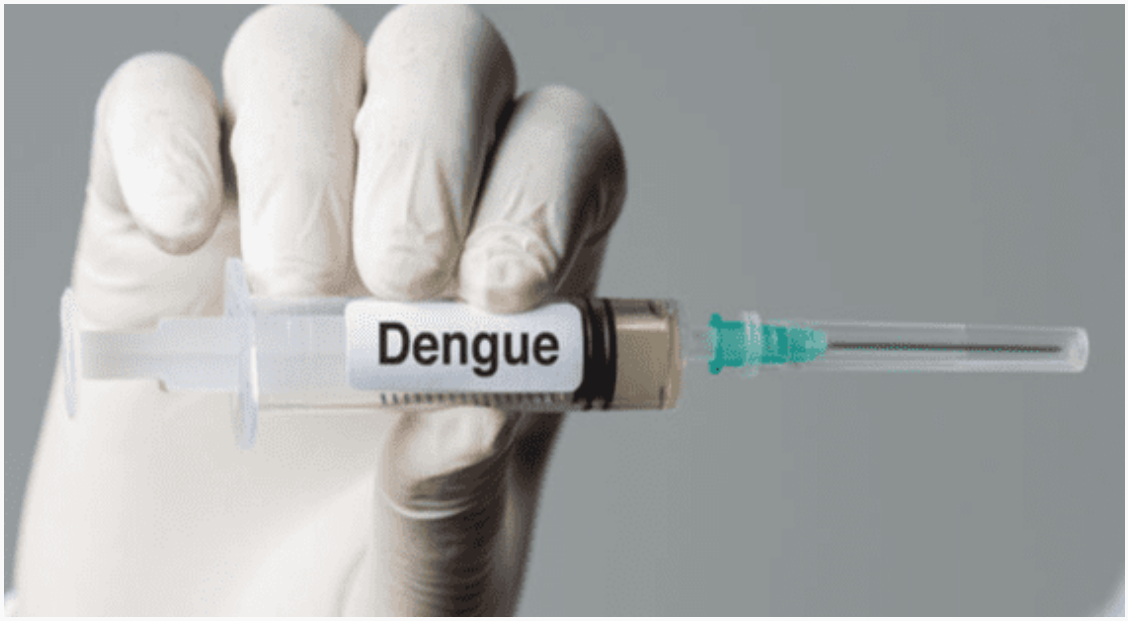
20 february 2024

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Cuban Biotechnology, Development of Vaccine against Dengue Fever

According to Cuban scientist Gerardo Guillén, director of Biomedical Research at the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB), "Cuba seeks to make the vaccine differently."

Achieving a vaccine against dengue is a historical desire of tropical countries where it is endemic. Cuba, which took up that challenge in 1992, now has two formulations in the preclinical study phase.



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On October 30, 2023, several media and press agencies in Cuba and around the world reported on the donation of some 27 million euros by the Italy-Cuba National Friendship Association to the Caribbean nation's prestigious Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB). The objective was to contribute to the development of a vaccine against dengue.

According to specialists, the process of developing the candidate vaccine is complex, since to be effective it must immunize against each of the four serotypes of the virus causing the infection. This would mean achieving a shield against a disease that kills 2.5 % of those hospitalized with severe symptoms, according to figures from the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Cuban Formula

There are countries that have already tested vaccines against dengue, such is the case of the Philippines, which finally stopped administering it in 2017. The vaccine in question was Dengvaxia, from the French pharmaceutical industry chain Sanofi Pasteur. After four children died of the disease in serious condition, the Philippine health authorities decided not to continue. This case showed how complex it can be to achieve a vaccine with the required effectiveness.

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On the other hand, it has not all been bad news, Brazil approved in March 2023 the use of the tetravalent vaccine of the Japanese pharmaceutical company Takeda. This vaccine, which is 80% effective, has been approved by the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

According to Cuban scientist Gerardo Guillén, director of Biomedical Research at the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB), "Cuba seeks to make the vaccine differently. Instead of using the protein found in the virus membrane, Cuban scientists are experimenting with its non-structural proteins (which encode the virus genes). The scientist explains that what they are looking for is for the vaccine to strengthen the cellular response of the person who receives it and not that of his or her antibodies. In this way, according to what they hope to prove in the laboratory, they could avoid the immunoamplification that makes the vaccine against dengue so difficult."

Although the vaccine could take a little longer than existing ones, Cuban scientists prefer it that way, explaining that it is more important to take time but do it right than to work on a schedule.

The strategy of having a vaccine produced domestically in Cuba would be extraordinary from many points of view.

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First, the country would greatly reduce the costs of immunization of its population. In turn, it would enter a market of billions of people in the world who are exposed to dengue along the tropical and subtropical belt, which would bring obvious economic benefits.



Published by TeleSUR 14 March 2024

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Reprogrammed the Havana International Book Fair

Changed the date of the Havana International Book Fair

According with the website Cubadebate, the date of the International party of the book in Cuba, scheduled to next year's February 8 to 18 was changed by Brazil's petition, the invited country to the event. Now is reprogrammed for 15 to 25 at the same month.



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The Ministry of Culture of the South American giant made the petition because the dates of its Carnival and the Book Fair coincided, and many of the artists and other personalities invited to the Havana will participate as well in the biggest and most important Brazilian festivity.

For the postponement of the Havana International Book Fair the provincials fairs will be postponed till the March 24.

With the José Martí's premise “Leer es crecer (Reading grows up)” the book party in Havana will be at its usual headquarters in the Park Morro Cabaña, as well, other spaces will be sub–headquarters, like the Pabellón Cuba and some Plazas of the Historical Center of La Habana Vieja.



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The Cuban writer and teacher Francisco López Sacha; and Isabel Monal, National Prize of Social Sciences, will be the honored guests of thise reading event.

Thise is the 32nd edition of the Havana International Book Fair, celebrated since 1982, every year is dedicated to a different country.

Published by TeleSUR 17 November 2023

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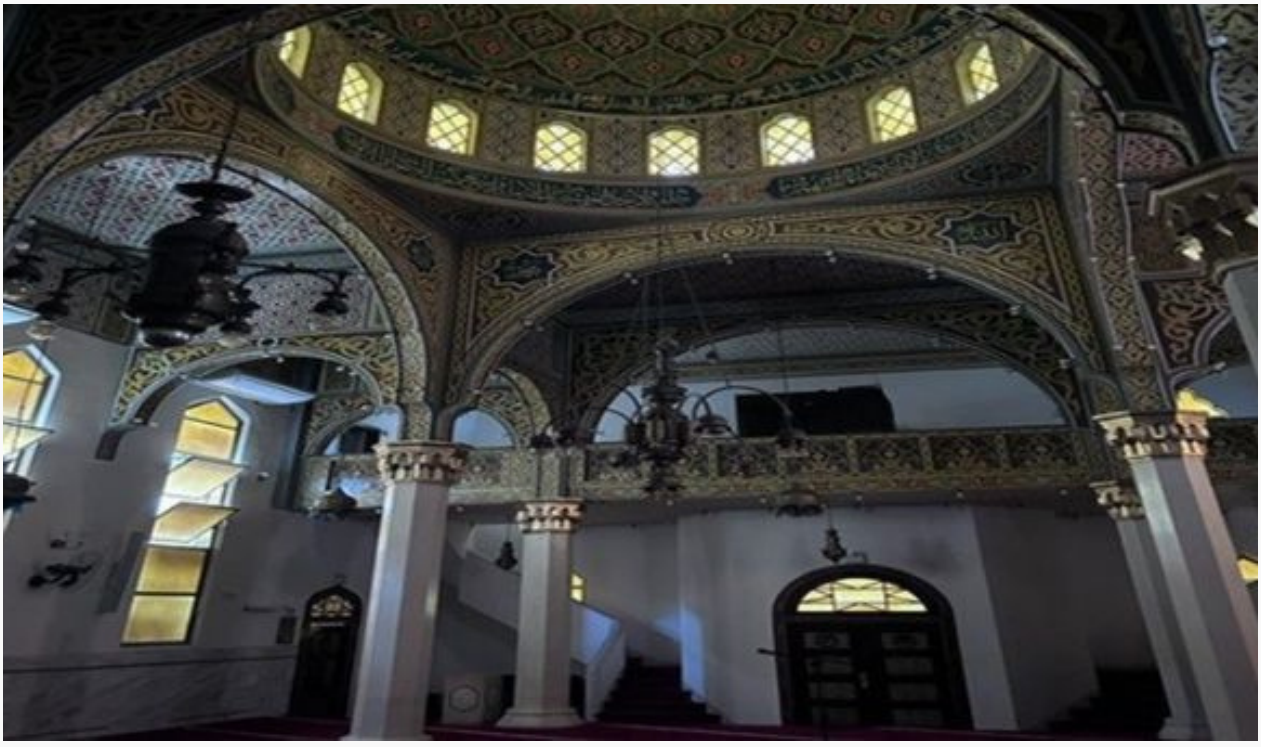
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Latin America, Heir to Arab Heritage

The cultural heritage bequeathed to us by the Arabs remains in our language, in our cuisine, in our way of life. Both Latin America and the world are heirs to their wisdom.

The Arab presence in Latin America dates back to the arrival of the Spanish around 1492, initiating a long process of constant cultural exchange between the New World and the Middle East.



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The encounter between the two cultures - as historians have called it - was in fact a multicultural encounter. The colonizers' ships were manned by hundreds of men from dissimilar cultures from the old continent, including the Arab culture.

Let us remember that the Arabs occupied the Iberian Peninsula, which they called Al-Andaluz. In this region, the Emirate of Granada, the last Arab stronghold in the peninsula, was the most important. Finally, with the advance of the Reconquest, initiated by the Christians in the northern mountains of the peninsula, the Emirate of Granada fell and the Arabs were expelled.

But it was impossible to expel more than eight hundred years of traditions, customs and cultural heritage. The descendants of the Arabs who remained in this region had to adapt to the new reality, change their surnames, adapt their religious customs, etc. However, this cultural heritage could never be erased, as it endured for centuries.

The first Arab descendants arrived in America on those three famous ships used by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage to the New World in 1492: La Niña, La Pinta and Santa María were the names of the ships. They were looking for a route that would take them to the Indies, since the Arabs blocked the passage through the European continent. Of these ships, two returned to Europe. The Santa Maria ran aground near the coasts of the Dominican Republic.

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The tweet reads, "April 4, 1979: the Arab Union of Cuba is created, which brings together the descendants of tens of thousands of Arabs registered in the country. It aims to preserve the identity, culture, customs, traditions and emotional ties with the homelands of their ancestors."

Without being aware of it, many Latin Americans carry surnames of Muslim heritage. In today's Spanish there are thousands of words that come directly from Arabic. Pronounced every day: azúcar, albañil, alforjas, azucenas, alelí, the Spanish denomination of ojala, is a derivation of the Islamic cult of Ala. Similarly, in architecture there are forms that come from the millenary Moorish tradition.

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Latin America had different waves of Arab migration from the Middle East, being from the late 19th century, when a large community of Arab origin disembarked. The first was between 1870 and 1900, the second between 1900 and 1914 and, finally, the third wave occurred as a consequence of the occupation of Palestine in 1948 and from 1974 with the civil war in Lebanon.

Among the countries that stand out the most are Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. They settled in many countries in the Latin American region, mainly in Venezuela, Chile and Argentina. It is estimated that more than 20 million found a new way of life. Today they are grouped into communities, associations and, despite living in a totally different environment, they maintain their main traditions.

Undoubtedly, it is a mistake to think that we are far removed from the Arabs. The cultural heritage they have bequeathed to us remains in our language, in our cuisine, in our way of life. This debunks the myth that Arabs are barbarians and have always been an inferior culture or that they are extremists for practicing Islam. None of this is true. Both Latin America and the world are heirs to their wisdom.

Published by TeleSUR 19 February 2024

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Gastronomy in Latin America and the Caribbean, a Cultural Mix

A kind of culinary mosaic emerges in the region, born from the encounter of different culinary traditions.

Latin American and Caribbean gastronomy is a labyrinth as complex as its geography. The gastronomy of the region is nothing more than the result of a crossroads of peoples, a fusion of ethnic, cultural and social elements that creates a delicious blend of flavors.



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We find a mixture of ingredients contributed by indigenous peoples, Africans, Spanish conquistadors and European and Asian immigrants who drew the first traces of what is known today as Latin American cuisine.

Talking about popular dishes in the region, it is essential to talk about Mexico, a country with a cuisine full of aromas: spicy ingredients stand out, being the so-called Tacos one of the most famous dishes. Of Arabic Shawarma origin, it consists of a corn tortilla stuffed with meat, vegetables and spicy ingredients. In Panama, Guacho is a dish based on rice and green beans, cooked in a thick soup of vegetables, meat, yucca, yams and cilantro.

A common characteristic is the rice and corn-based dishes, which are widespread throughout the continent; the former was a contribution from other cultures and the latter is indigenous. In Venezuela, you can taste the corn-based Arepa, a traditional dish of exquisite flavor and excellent quality that can be found in every corner.

Colombia, according to specialists, has one of the most dynamic cuisines in Latin America, which combines an amazing amount of flavors, mixed with spices, even reminiscent of Arabian cuisine. Today we highlight the Pan de yuca or Pandebono, which as its name suggests, its main ingredient is yucca or manioc, another Latin contribution to the world. It is usually eaten in the morning or as a snack before lunch.

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The tweet reads, "Ropa vieja, moros y cristianos, tostones de plátano and yuca al mojo! Latin American gastronomy has a very special place in the kitchens of the "Instituto Gastronómico de Mérida," since it has the subject of American Regional Cuisine."

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Brazil, due to its geographical extension, has an infinite number of typical dishes. Moqueca, a dish based on fish and seafood, tomato, onion, garlic, coriander and coconut milk, is consumed almost everywhere in the country.

In the Caribbean region, Cuba has one of the unique cuisines, with a wide variety of dishes such as ajiaco, ropa vieja, with beef as the main ingredient, as well as casabe, a dish originating from the aboriginal tradition.

Finally, in the so-called southern cone of Latin America, which includes countries such as Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina, we find typical dishes such as the famous asados, a dish that stands out even in international cuisine. Based on beef, it is enjoyed with family or friends, and is ideal for days of celebration or family gatherings.

Latin American and Caribbean cuisine is, without a doubt, an explosion of flavors, colors and smells. Many traditions have been combined to give shape to dishes that today constitute elements of identity of the countries of origin, in full connection with their ancestral roots.

Published by TeleSUR 19 February 2024