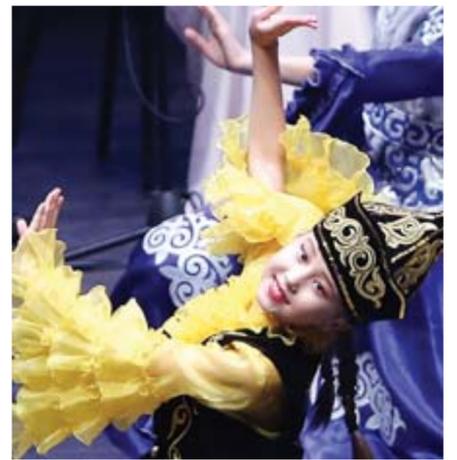




Kyrgyz band 'Cholpon & Akak'



Kyrgyz band "Cholpon & Akak" perform during a cultural festival for children and young people held at the Abdullhussain Abduredha theatre in Kuwait City. — AFP photos

Oscar winner Malek sought reassurances over Bond film role

Oscar winner Rami Malek has revealed he thought twice before signing up to play the lead villain in the latest long-awaited James Bond film opposite Daniel Craig. The US actor, who won the Oscar this year for his performance as Freddie Mercury in "Bohemian Rhapsody", said he feared his Egyptian ancestry could lead to the part being a caricature of a Middle Eastern terrorist. Malek told reporters in New York that he raised his concerns with the film's director Cary Fukunaga and received reassurances that was "not his vision", according to Britain's Daily Mirror tabloid.

"That was one thing that I discussed with Cary," he said. "I said, 'We cannot identify him with any act of terrorism reflecting an ideology or a religion.' "That's not something I would entertain, so if that is why I am your choice then you can count me out." "But that was clearly not his vision. So he's a very different kind of terrorist," the actor added. Malek, who was born in Los Angeles in 1981 to parents who immigrated to the United States from Egypt three years earlier, has said he identifies strongly with his Egyptian heritage.

"I am Egyptian. I grew up listening to Egyptian music," he told GQ magazine last year. "These are my people. I feel so gorgeously tied to the culture and the human beings that exist there." Malek will star alongside Craig—who is set to bow out after five films and eight years as 007 — in the 25th edition of one of the world's most enduring franchises. However, the as-yet untitled film has been besieged by problems, most recently with Craig undergoing minor ankle surgery after an injury on set.

The production was repeatedly delayed over script disputes and after Oscar-winning director Danny Boyle quit the project. The film is now due to open in cinemas in the United States, Britain and France on April 8, 2020. Malek revealed that he has already filmed some scenes in Norway—though without Craig—and praised the latest installment in the 007 spy series. "It's another extremely clever script from the people who have figured out exactly what people want in those movies," he said. "But I feel a substantial weight on my shoulders. I mean, Bond is something that we all grow up with." — AFP



Oscar winner Rami Malek

Woody Allen debuts at Milan's world-famous La Scala

Woody Allen is making his debut at Milan's legendary La Scala opera house directing a Puccini production before a European audience apparently unswayed by historic sex abuse allegations. Journalists at a press conference were told to limit questions to the production of Giacomo Puccini's "Gianni Schicchi" which debuts on Saturday. Amazon put Allen's latest film "A Rainy Day in New York" on ice over decades-old sex abuse allegations against the US director, but another distributor will release the film in Europe later this year. When asked why he thought he was better received in Europe than in the US, 83-year-old Allen said "I don't know."

"When I started making movies 50 years ago... I always had a very warm and affectionate following in Europe and even when films of mine were not as well received in the United States, in Italy, France and Germany they received my films." The opera will run until July 19, performed by students at the world-famous Scala. Allen's production was first performed in Los Angeles in 2008. "The students are just fantastic and they are doing a great, great job making the opera exactly the way I wanted and also fulfilling Puccini's goals," Allen said. "One of the great pleasures in my life has been able to take a break from doing movies and movies and coming to La Scala and staging an opera at this iconic opera house," he said.

In February, Allen filed a \$68 million (60 million euros) suit against Amazon for breach of contract, accusing the streaming giant of cancelling the film because of a "baseless" accusation that he sexually abused his daughter. Allen has been accused of molesting Dylan Farrow, his adopted daughter, when she was seven years old in the early 1990s. He was cleared of the charges, first leveled by his then-partner Mia Farrow, after two separate months-long investigations, and has steadfastly denied the abuse. But Dylan, now an adult, maintains she was molested. — AFP



(From left) German stage director Grischa Asagaroff, Hungarian conductor Adam Fischer, US director Woody Allen and Scala director Alexander Pereira attend a press conference for the presentation of La Scala's stage production of two one-act operas, one by Salieri and the other by Puccini at the Scala Opera House in Milan. — AFP photos



US director Woody Allen looks on within a press conference for the presentation of his stage production of Giacomo Puccini's one-act opera "Gianni Schicchi".

Germany hands back Nazi-looted painting to Jewish heirs

Germany yesterday returned a painting looted by the Nazis which ended up in the spectacular art hoard of Cornelius Gurlitt, the son of a Third Reich-era art dealer. "Quai de Clichy" by Paul Signac was handed back to the family of French real estate broker Gaston Prosper Levy, in the sixth such return from Gurlitt's trove. Investigators looking into the provenance of paintings in the stash left behind by Gurlitt found eyewitness accounts of German soldiers seizing the Signac work from Levy's property in France in 1940.

"A countless number of the mostly Jewish collectors of art and cultural goods like Gaston Prosper Levy were

persecuted, robbed or expropriated by Nazis," said Germany's Culture Minister Monika Gruetters. "Others have had to sell their property far below its value or leave it behind while fleeing or emigrating. We can never make good on the suffering and injustice." Such returns are important, the minister said, as they offer "at least a little bit of historical justice".

More than 1,500 artworks were discovered in 2012 in the possession of Munich pensioner Gurlitt. His father, Hildebrand Gurlitt, had worked as an art dealer for the Nazis from 1938. The discovery of the stash made headlines around the world and revived an emotional debate about how thoroughly post-war Germany had dealt with art plundered by the Nazi regime. When Gurlitt died, the Bern museum accepted the collection, though it left about 500 works in Germany for a government task force to research their often murky origins. Determining their provenance has been slow, and it remained unclear how many of the works were stolen. —AFP



German Government's Commissioner for Culture and the Media Monika Gruetters hands over the painting "Quai de Clichy" by French Neo-Impressionist Paul Signac to Agnes Sevestre-Barbe, representative of the heirs. — AFP