

Space

'No EU Mars mission'

# 3 cosmonauts arrive at ISS in yellow and blue

NEW YORK, March 19, (AP): Three Russian cosmonauts arrived at the International Space Station (ISS) on Friday wearing yellow flight suits with blue accents, colors that appeared to match the Ukrainian flag. The men were the first new arrivals on the space station since the start of the Russian war in Ukraine last month.

Russian space corporation Roscosmos cosmonauts Oleg Artemyev, Denis Matveyev and Sergey Korsakov blasted off successfully from the Russia-leased Baikonur launch facility in Kazakhstan in their Soyuz MS-21 spacecraft at 8:55 p.m. Friday (11:55 a.m. EDT). They smoothly docked at the station just over three hours later, joining two Russians, four Americans and a German on the orbiting outpost.

Video of Artemyev taken as the spacecraft prepared to dock with the space station showed him wearing a blue flight suit. It was unclear what, if any, message the yellow uniforms they changed into were intended to send.

When the cosmonauts were able to talk to family back on Earth, Artemyev was asked about the suits. He said every crew chooses their own.

Contracts

"It became our turn to pick a color. But in fact, we had accumulated a lot of yellow material so we needed to use it. So that's why we had to wear yellow," he said.

Since the war started, many people have used the Ukrainian flag and its colors to show solidarity with the country.

The war has resulted in canceled spacecraft launches and broken contracts. Roscosmos chief Dmitry Rogozin has warned that the U.S. would have to use "broomsticks" to fly into space after Russia said it would stop

supplying rocket engines to U.S. companies. Many worry, however, that Rogozin is putting decades of a peaceful off-planet partnership at risk, most notably at the space station.

NASA Administrator **Bill Nelson** played down Rogozin's comments, telling The Associated Press: "That's just Dmitry Rogozin. He spouts off every now and then. But at the end of the day, he's worked with us."

Cooperation

"The other people that work in the Russian civilian space program, they're professional," Nelson told the AP on Friday. "They don't miss a beat with us, American astronauts and American mission control. Despite all of that, up in space, we can have a cooperation with our Russian friends, our colleagues."

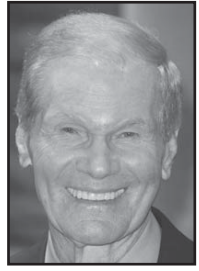
NASA astronaut Mark Vande Hei - who on Tuesday broke the US single spaceflight record of 340 days - is due to leave the space station with two Russians aboard a Soyuz capsule for a touchdown in Kazakhstan on March 30.

In April, another three NASA and one Italian astronaut are set to blast off for the space station.

Meanwhile, NASA Administrator **Bill Nelson** on Friday played down recent comments by the head of Russia's space agency that the United States would have to use broomsticks to fly to space after Russia said it would stop supplying rocket engines to US companies.

"That's just Dmitry Rogozin. He spouts off every now and then. But at the end of the day, he's worked with us," Nelson told The Associated Press. "The other people that work in the Russian civilian space program, they're professional. They don't miss a beat with us, American astronauts and American mission control."

Nelson spoke with The Associated Press hours before three Russian cosmonauts launched from Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan to the International Space Station, the first crew launch since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February.



Nelson



In this frame grab from video provided by Roscosmos, Russian cosmonauts Sergey Korsakov, Oleg Artemyev and Denis Matveyev are seen during a welcome ceremony after arriving at the International Space Station, Friday, March 18, the first new faces in space since the start of Russia's war in Ukraine. The crew emerged from the Soyuz capsule wearing yellow flight suits with blue stripes, the colors of the Ukrainian flag. (AP)

## Hong Kong's COVID infections exceed 1mn

# China reports 1st COVID deaths since Jan 2021

BEIJING, March 19, (AP): China's national health authorities reported two COVID-19 deaths on Saturday, the first recorded rise in the death toll since January 2021, as the country battles an omicron-driven surge.

The deaths, both in northeastern Jilin province, bring the country's coronavirus death toll to 4,638.

China reported 2,157 new COVID-19 cases from community transmission on Saturday, with the majority in Jilin. The province has instituted a travel ban, with people needing permission from police to travel across borders.

China has continued to impose a successful, if burdensome "zero-COVID" strategy since the initial outbreak in Wuhan. The strategy focuses on mass testing and strict lockdowns with residents banned from leaving their homes until all new cases are either found in quarantine or through contact tracing.

In practice, it meant the country has seen relatively few infections from the virus because clusters are stamped down as quickly as they're discovered. The strategy has received popular support and prevented the large numbers of deaths seen in other countries, many

of which have started to forgo any kind of social distancing measures.

With China now facing its worst outbreak since late 2019, officials have vowed to double down on the zero-tolerance strategy to contain the current surge. However, China's leader Xi Jinping acknowledged for the first time the burden of the measures on Thursday, saying that China should seek "maximum effect" with "minimum cost" in controlling the virus.

Pandemic

China had recorded 4,636 deaths since the pandemic began in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019. It revised its death toll once in April 2020, adding in new deaths that were not initially counted as the pandemic overwhelmed the city's hospitals and other systems.

Mainland China's COVID-19 data is counted separately from that in Hong Kong, which is a special administrative region in China and is facing a much larger outbreak with a higher death toll.

Hong Kong's total coronavirus infections exceeded 1 million and the number of related deaths topped those

in mainland China, as the city grapples with a widespread outbreak.

Health officials reported 20,079 confirmed infections on Friday, taking the total since the start of the pandemic to 1,016,944.

Nearly 97% of those came from Hong Kong's current wave, which began in December. Since Feb. 9, nearly 5,200 people have died from the virus.

The total number of deaths in Hong Kong - 5,401 - have exceeded the fatalities recorded in mainland China at 4,636. Mainland authorities have counted 126,234 confirmed cases, but unlike most countries, China does not count asymptomatic cases.

The city of 7.5 million is in the grip of an omicron surge that has strained its health care system as hospitals reached maximum capacity. Coffins are running out and mortuaries are so full that bodies have to be temporarily stored in refrigerated containers.

Most of the deceased were elderly patients, a majority of whom are not fully vaccinated.

For most of the pandemic, Hong Kong was able to stamp out earlier outbreaks with tough "zero COVID" restrictions that temporarily shuttered businesses, limited public gather-

ings and imposed entry curbs such as lengthy quarantines for arrivals and flight bans from countries deemed high-risk.

That changed with the highly transmissible omicron variant. Officials have sought assistance from mainland China, which has sent experts and medical resources to help Hong Kong combat the pandemic.

Also:

**WASHINGTON:** Drugmaker Moderna asked the Food and Drug Administration on Thursday to authorize a fourth shot of its COVID-19 vaccine as a booster dose for all adults.

The request is broader than rival pharmaceutical company Pfizer's request earlier this week for the regulator to approve a booster shot for all seniors.

In a press release, the company said its request for approval for all adults was made "to provide flexibility" to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and medical providers to determine the "appropriate use" of a second booster dose of the mRNA vaccine, "including for those at higher risk of COVID-19 due to age or comorbidities."

## Tens of amateurs and professionals take part in Gulf Bank's «Off-Roading» Challenge

# Gulf Bank's "Off-Roading Challenge": Resounding Success for the First Event of its Kind in Kuwait



Amid a huge turnout of spectators of all ages, Gulf Bank successfully wrapped up the first sports event of its kind in Kuwait: the Gulf Bank "Off-Roading" challenge. The event was on Friday in Bneider, with the participation of tens of off-roading amateurs and professionals who competed over the course of five hours.

After fierce competition between the contestants, who overcame both natural and artificial barriers, the Organizing Committee announced the 6 winning athletes of the race, 3 from the professional category: Talal Al-Sabah, Youssef Al-Mutawa and Abdul Aziz bin Saghir, and 3 from the amateur category: Suleiman Al-Khudari, Faisal Al-Hajri and Majed Al-Qaisi.

This year's Off-Roading Challenge was the first event of its kind in Kuwait, and was held by Gulf Bank, in cooperation with the Suffix company for sports events management and Kuwait Motor Sport Club. On the sidelines of the race, the Gulf Bank team held mini competitions for spectators and visitors. Spectators were asked questions related to the Off-Roading Challenge.

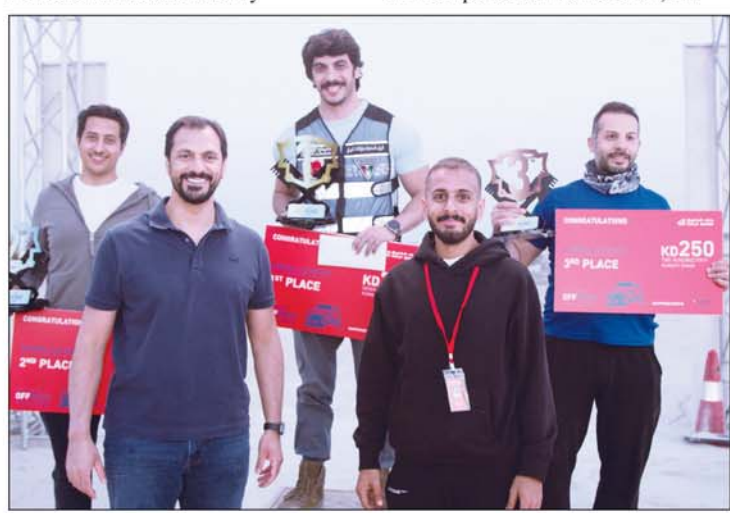
The Deputy General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Ahmad Al-Amir commented: "We would like to congratulate the Off-Roading Challenge first-place winners. We are looking forward to putting on more sporting and social events that meet the needs and aspirations of all segments of our society, especially as we start to navigate our new, post-pandemic normal."

**Ahmed Al-Amir:**  
In light of the great turnout and the demands of young people, we are considering organizing the event annually

He added: In light of the large public attendance, especially from the youth group, and the large number of requests to participate in the past from amateurs and professionals in the "Off Road" sport, which reflects the interest of the youth in practicing this sport, and based on their demands, we are considering developing and organizing the event annually.

As part of its ongoing commitment to social responsibility and its continuous support of local youth, Gulf Bank is keen to organize multiple sporting events throughout the year, providing local youth with the opportunity to practice their beloved sports and pursue their passions - all while competing for valuable cash prizes.

He stated that sustainability



**Fahad Al-Sharrah:**  
Gulf Bank puts the youth in the center of its attention and is keen to have a permanent presence with all segments of society

while maintaining the strictest security and safety measures.

Al-Sharrah affirmed Gulf Bank's interest in sponsoring sporting events as part of the Bank's role in promoting local youth's mental and physical health. Gulf Bank greatly prioritizes the local youth segment both in terms of its banking services and its commitment to their social wellbeing.

He pointed out that Gulf Bank, based on its motto "Always With You," presents a distinct model for sustainability programs that include all segments of the local population, resulting in multiple initiatives that promote a great quality of life, including sports, health, and education activities.

Social responsibility is one of



the main pillars of Gulf Bank's 2025 strategy. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) social responsibility program, heading various educational initiatives throughout the year that have a sustainable impact on the lives of youth and society.

A Successful Partnership

On his part, General Manager at the Suffix company for sports events management, Ahmed Al Majed, said: "We are proud to partner with Gulf Bank to organize the Off-Roading Challenge, the first sports event of its kind in Kuwait. We were extremely impressed to witness all the athletes' performances and the huge public turnout, a true testament to the

event's success."

He pointed out that Suffix's partnership with Gulf Bank in organizing sporting events extends longer than six years, with Suffix assisting in organizing the annual Gulf Bank 642 Marathon. The marathon was recently awarded a Bronze Ranking by World Athletics, an honor that Gulf Bank shares among only 128 marathons around the world.

The race consisted of 9 stages, with each stage varying between natural terrain and industrial challenges. Contestants were evaluated by a panel of judges, and were judged based on their timing and performance in their respective car categories.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with the different relevant parties to achieve it.

