

Palestinians plan Eurovision alternative

Author:

Fri, 2019-05-17 00:14

RAMALLAH: Israel hosts the Eurovision song contest this week and the thousands of visitors who come with it, but Palestinians are planning an alternative they hope draws attention to the country's occupation.

The alternative to Eurovision, called "Globalvision," will be held on Saturday, the same day of the song contest's finals in Tel Aviv.

Pro-Palestinian campaigners say the idea for it came from the fact that they do not want to simply oppose the Israeli event but host a positive alternative.

Globalvision parties are expected in London, Dublin, the Palestinian city of Ramallah and Haifa in northern Israel, which has a significant Arab population.

No European TV channels are expected to feature the events but they will be streamed online, with organizers encouraging people to tune in instead of watching Eurovision.

Among those expected to take part is influential British musician and producer Brian Eno, along with prominent Palestinian musicians.

The Haifa event will feature a drag queen and other performers who will fulfil the desire for the famed Eurovision kitsch, said Najwan Berekdar, one of the organizers.

BACKGROUND

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She said the aim was to create an "alternative musical event that highlights the original values of Eurovision, which is inclusion and diversity."

Tel Aviv hosts the largest Gay Pride event in the Middle East every year and the city has a cosmopolitan feel.

This tolerance of homosexuality is often trumpeted by Israeli officials, who compare it to many Arab states where homosexuality is criminalized.

Critics say this amounts to "pinkwashing" – seeking to use its pro-gay

attitudes to downplay its occupation of Palestinian territory.

Israel occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War. It later annexed East Jerusalem in a move never accepted by the international community.

More than 600,000 Israelis live in settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in communities considered illegal under international law.

“Israel is using art and culture to whitewash occupation,” Berekdar said.

Apart from Globalvision, Palestinians have been seeking to have their voices heard in other ways.

Madonna has received criticism for her planned performance at Eurovision on Saturday, including a plea to cancel from the mother of a Palestinian journalist shot dead by Israeli forces during protests and clashes along the Gaza-Israel border last year.

The US pop star has since said she will reject boycott calls and headline the event.

Anti-occupation NGO Breaking the Silence has also erected a billboard in Israel with the slogan “Dare to Dream of Freedom,” playing on this year’s Eurovision slogan “Dare to Dream.”

And in Gaza on Tuesday, musicians performed in the shadow of a building destroyed by an Israeli air strike in response to Palestinian rocket fire earlier this month.

Tuesday night saw hackers succeed in flashing a fake rocket attack warning during the webcast of a Eurovision semifinal in an incident Israel’s public broadcaster blamed on Hamas, the Islamist movement that runs the Gaza Strip.

There was however no comment from Hamas on the allegation.

Back in Tel Aviv, Israeli police have increased their presence ahead of the event with a spokesman saying “hundreds of police officers, special patrol units and private security guards (are) securing the beach area, Eurovillage and the area of the expo.”

On stage in Tel Aviv, all eyes will be on Iceland’s entry for a potential protest.

The band Hatari, who dress in so-called BDSM outfits – bondage clothing including leather and whips – have been critical of Israel.

They have previously challenged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to a Glima, a Nordic folk wrestling match, and could still seek to highlight the Palestinians’ plight during the extravaganza.



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Palestinians want Jerusalem cut from Eurovision videos
Gaza artists call on Eurovision singers to boycott Israel

[Syrian refugees struggle to make ends meet during Ramadan](#)

Author:

Thu, 2019-05-16 23:31

AMMAN: For Um Nabil, a 46-year-old Syrian refugee living in Irbid in Jordan, preparing the iftar dinner on the first day of Ramadan was a challenge. With three children to raise alone and with little money left, she had to borrow the funds to buy half a chicken to cook for the meal.

Um Nabil's husband left for Syria to collect his mother after his father died but has not returned for three years. Not only did her husband leave her with her three children, she also has to deal with his second wife and their child.

Despite her difficult life, Um Nabil told Arab News that her situation is

much better than some. She looks out of the kitchen window and points to her three Syrian neighbors. "They live in even smaller apartments and God knows how bad their situation is."

A few vegetables can be seen outside the kitchen window. Um Nabil has learned how to grow vegetables without soil and has been able to produce enough for her family as well as sell anything extra. She regularly plants lettuce, tomatoes and beans.

Last year Um Nabil volunteered with a local agency which gave her 13 Jordanian dinars (\$18) a day in return for her help.

This year with her husband gone, she has to figure out ways to pay the steep cost of the rent at 140 Jordanian dinars per month. She depends on the monthly food stipend from the World Food Program for the amount of 60 Jordanian dinars, less than half the cost of rent alone.

As the time for breaking the fast approaches, Um Nabil's children gather in what they call the sitting room, a room with old furniture that is in need of repair. Wafa, the oldest daughter at 17, said that Ramadan was much better in Syria: "All that is left of Ramadan is sitting together and eating rice and other things."

Um Nabil recalls the dinners she used to prepare with many dishes and fresh juices. "We used to get what we wanted without thinking of money."

Asked why she does not return, Um Nabil said that although her house was not badly destroyed in Dera'a, her friends advised her not to go back. "We communicate a lot and they tell me don't come back. Life is not easy in Syria."

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says that 137,539 registered Syrian refugees live in Irbid while Jordanian government sources say that the number is closer to 250,000.

Since the opening of the Jaber crossing point, 16,700 of the 671,000 registered Syrian refugees living in Jordan have returned. Jordan says that the actual number of refugees (both registered and unregistered) is more than 1 million.

Jordan's promise to provide work permits for Syrians has failed to address the economic problems facing them with only 40,000 documented permits issued, according to official sources.

International agencies say that the average annual income of Syrian refugees in Amman, Irbid and Zarqa is about 3,000 Jordanian dinars while in Mafraq and some of the refugee camps the average income is 1,000 Jordanian dinars.

Nearly 98 percent of the income of Syrian families goes to pay rent, which ranges from 120 to 140 Jordanian dinars a month, according to a study prepared by the Norwegian Agency Fafo.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi has issued an international

appeal for donor help to support Syrian families in countries such as Jordan during Ramadan. "Ramadan is a month of compassion, renewal and service. The resilience of refugees inspires us and reminds us that all actions that we take, big or small, can have an impact."

The family of Um Nabil has no money and so pays little attention to the many Ramadan deserts available locally.

While some Jordanians continue to suffer economically, overall there is a wide gap between Syrian refugees and most Jordanians.

The long lines outside the Syrian ice-cream store Bakdash or Nafisa sweets in Amman, and other high-quality restaurants opened by Syrian entrepreneurs largely for Jordanian and expat clients, reflects the gap that has become more obvious during Ramadan.



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Saudi medical volunteers welcome in Ramadan at camp for Syrian refugees
To fast or not? Syrians in Raqqa mark relaxed Ramadan

Suspects back in Morocco court over Scandinavian hiker murders

Author:

Ismail Bellaouali and Hamza Mekouar | AFP

ID:

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Thu, 2019-05-16 16:48

SALE, Morocco: Two dozen extremist suspects charged over the murder of two Scandinavian women hiking in Morocco appeared in court Thursday, with the lawyer of one victim saying the government must be held "morally responsible" for the killings.

Danish student Louisa Vesterager Jespersen, 24, and 28-year-old Norwegian Maren Ueland had their throats slit while camping in an isolated area of the High Atlas mountains in December.

The main suspects, who allegedly pledged allegiance to Daesh, are all from the Marrakesh region near the site of the killings, which shocked the North African country.

Abdessamad Ejjoud, a 25-year-old street vendor and the alleged leader of the group, had been jailed for trying to join Daesh in Syria. He was released in 2015.

Younes Ouaziyad, a 27-year-old carpenter, and 33-year-old street vendor Rachid Afatti have also been named as key suspects.

The defendants were taken from prison to an anti-terrorism court in Sale, near Rabat, in vans escorted by police on motorcycles for the resumption of their trial, an AFP reporter said.

They face charges including promoting terrorism, forming a terrorist cell and premeditated murder.

They could face death sentences if found guilty, although Morocco has de facto suspended executions since 1993.

The families of the accused did not attend the court session.

The lawyer for the Jespersens, Khalid Elfataoui, said the government must be held "morally responsible" so the family could receive compensation, a request accepted by the court.

Elfataoui said he would push for death sentences "even if the countries where the victims came from are opposed to it in principle."

The main suspects "spontaneously admitted their crime during the investigation, and today they regret what they did," their lawyer Hafida Mekessaoui told AFP.

The trial – which opened on May 2 – was adjourned to May 30 after Thursday's brief hearing.

Among the suspects is a Spanish-Swiss convert to Islam who is accused of teaching the main defendant how to use encrypted communications and fire a gun.

Nature lovers Jespersen and Ueland shared an apartment and went to Norway's Bo University where they were studying to be guides.

They had traveled together to Morocco for their Christmas holidays.

Their lives were cut short in the foothills of Toubkal, the highest summit in

North Africa, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) from the city of Marrakesh, a tourist magnet.

According to the charge sheet, the assailants traveled to the High Atlas mountains on December 12 on a mission to kill tourists.

Several potential targets were passed over because the foreigners were accompanied by guides or local residents.

It was four days before the killers selected their targets, according to the prosecution. It said two of them carried out the killings while the third filmed them on a telephone.

After the bodies were discovered, the Moroccan authorities were initially cautious, referring to a “criminal act” and wounds to the victims’ necks. But that changed when the video surfaced showing a victim being beheaded. A separate video published in the initial aftermath of the murders showed the alleged killers pledging allegiance to Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi. Investigators said the “cell” was inspired by Daesh ideology, but Morocco’s anti-terror chief insisted the accused had no contact with the extremist group in conflict zones.

Daesh has never claimed responsibility for the double murder.



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Morocco court adjourns trial in murder of Scandinavian hikers
New social deal signed in Morocco, salaries to rise

Plane crash near Dubai airport kills three Britons and a South African

Thu, 2019-05-16 20:10

DUBAI: Four people were killed when a small plane crashed near Dubai International Airport, temporarily halting some flights in and out of the busy regional hub.

The crash killed three Britons and a South African on board the four-seater Diamond DA62, the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority said. The UK registered plane was on a mission to calibrate terrestrial navigation systems at the airport when it crashed about 5 kilometers south of the airport.

The crash was due to a mechanical fault, Dubai Media Office said.

The airport said it halted flights from 7.36 p.m. until 8.22 p.m. local time over the crash.

“All operations at the Dubai airport are running smoothly after a slight delay and diversion of some flights as a precautionary measure to ensure security following a minor incident involving a small plane,” the media office said.

Government of Dubai Media Office: An accident involving a small plane with 4 passengers occurred resulting in the death of the pilot and his assistant. The relevant teams are on the scene.
pic.twitter.com/HVX9tJrKYp

– Dubai Media Office (@DXBMediaOffice) [May 16, 2019](#)

Dubai International Airport, home to the long-haul carrier Emirates, is the world’s busiest airport for international travel.



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Normal operations resume at Dubai airport after suspected drone activity grounded flights
Dubai Airport dismisses reports of Houthi drone attack

[Macron to meet Libya's eastern commander Haftar next week](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

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Thu, 2019-05-16 16:15

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron will meet eastern Libyan commander Khalifa Haftar in the middle of next week to discuss how to resume peace talks in the country, a French presidential source said on Thursday. Macron last week called for a cease-fire in the month-long battle for Libya's

capital Tripoli after meeting UN-backed Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Al-Serraj.

“They will discuss the situation in Libya, the conditions for a return to political dialogue following the visit of Serraj and in co-ordination with the United Nations and partners,” the source told Reuters.

Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte met Haftar on Thursday as European powers seek to put an end to fighting after troops loyal to Haftar launched an offensive on the capital breaking months of UN-led peace negotiations.

“Prime Minister Conte reiterated the need to agree to a cease-fire as soon as possible to avoid a humanitarian crisis in the country and safeguard the already difficult conditions of the Libyan people,” his office said.

Tripoli is home to the UN-backed administration but some European countries such as France have also supported eastern military commander Haftar as a way to fight militants in a country in chaos since the toppling of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011.

A day after meeting Macron last week, Serraj’s administration asked 40 foreign firms including French oil major Total to renew their licenses or have their operations suspended.



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El-Sisi and Haftar discuss Egyptian support for Libyan National Army
Daesh attack on Haftar camp in south Libya kills 9 soldiers