

BAKU: TEHRAN PLOTTING AGAINST EUROVISION



This year, Eurovision has moved east to Azerbaijani, a country which borders Iran to the north. This has led to a clash of Western and Islamic cultures. There have been demonstrations in Iran against Baku's cooperation with the west and its hosting of Europe's biggest songfest, the Eurovision.

The Iranian ambassador to Azerbaijan has been recalled back to Tehran after protestors insulted Iran's late supreme and revolutionary leader outside the Iranian embassy in Baku.

Ahmed Nemati, charge d'affaires at the Iranian embassy in Baku said in a statement that Ambassador Mohammad Bagher Bahrami had left for Tehran on 21st May for consultation as a result of religious saints being insulted in Azerbaijan.

This move came after a rally outside the Iranian embassy by dozens of Azerbaijani protestors last week. Some of the protestors displayed signs mocking Iran's late supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Armenia which has had a long dispute with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region is also boycotting the event.

Azerbaijani's ambassador to Iran, Javanshir Akhundov, was summoned to the foreign ministry to be notified of Iran's protest over "insulting religious sanctities". This was according to the official IRNA news agency.

IRNA also confirmed the recalling of Iran's ambassador to Azerbaijani

Lawmakers in Azerbaijani, during a heated debate in parliament, criticized Iran over their ambassador's recall. They said that Iran calculated the timing of its decision so as to get maximum media attention.

Mubariz Gurbanly, a governing party lawmaker was of the view that Iran was using the Eurovision as a pretext of increasing pressure on Baku. He further added that what Iran was doing was wrong as it endangered the region's peace and stability.

The prestigious Eurovision completion, which is being hosted in Baku, has been slammed by some Iranian clerics as immoral.

Ali Hasanoy, an Azerbaijani presidential administration official said Iran was spreading false information and rumors that there would be a gay pride marriage in Baku during the Eurovision week.

He added that Tehran wanted Azerbaijan to cut its friendly ties with Israel and the US and also become an Islamic state.

Azerbaijani media on Tuesday reported that they had arrested 11 Islamist radicals in Sumgayit city for plotting campaigns against the Eurovision.

According to the police, pro Islamic materials and anti euro vision CDs which in recent days had

been distributed to some households in Sumgayit and Baku were also found.

Azerbaijan, an oil rich state, has sought to use the Eurovision event, which is viewed by over 125 million people worldwide to boast its global image.

The days leading up to the event have however been marred by allegations of human rights abuses and the row with Iran.

In recent months, tensions between the Islamic republic and the former Soviet state of Azerbaijan, which is officially a secular republic but with a Muslim majority have increased especially after a series of suspected terrorists with alleged links to Iran, were arrested in Baku.

Tensions have also been heightened due to Baku's close ties with Jerusalem which Iran openly calls for destruction and amid sustained international pressure on Tehran to suspend its nuclear program.

Azeri officials had denied reports that Israel or any other nation would launch an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities from Azerbaijan territory.

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