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Aims at reaching out to other cultures Moroccan festival revives Berber music



Moroccans at the Timitar festival

DUBAI (Al Arabiya)

The open air theater of the southern Moroccan city of Agadir echoed with Amazigh (Berber) music as the Timitar Music Festival continues to revive a forgotten culture, according to media reports.

In an attempt to protect their culture from erasure as video clips and modern songs are increasingly invading the Moroccan cultural scene and as CDs and DVDs have become the major source of music, the Timitar festival is held every year to revive Amazigh folklore as well as reach out to other cultures, Al Arabiya T.V. reported Friday.

Organizers of the festival, which entered its sixth year, say they are aiming at making Amazigh music transcend the local level and get in touch with other cultures. That is why other non-Moroccan bands have been taking part in the festival, particularly from Africa and Latin America. The result is a unique type of music that blends Amazigh and international music.

Besides its rich native Amazigh tradition, the Atlantic city of Agadir is the destination of thousands of European tourists. For these two reasons, the festival attracts masses of local and foreign audience which reached 100,000 last year.

Timitar means "signs" in the local dialect of the Amazigh language spoken by nearly half the Moroccan population. The festival is seen as offering signs of cultural revival for the region's indigenous traditions. The music of Sous--the region which includes Agadir--is also a type of Amazigh music that the Timitar festival focuses on reviving.

Celebrating Amazigh music in Morocco has more political than cultural connotations. The Amazigh people, widely known as Berbers, believe their language has been marginalized in Morocco even after it

started to be part of school curricula all over the kingdom.

Although teaching the language in schools was hailed by many as a positive step towards recognizing it as an official language like Arabic, others have argued that official recognition should have come first.

The Moroccan government established the Royal Institute for the Amazigh Culture in charge of developing the language and setting its school curricula. An Amazigh graduate studies program was also launched this year.

Amazigh activists view the recognition of their language as a prerequisite for democracy and respect for diversity. They also argue that even though Arabic is the official language in the constitution, it is still not that vital because Moroccans do not use it on daily basis.

(Translated from Arabic by Sonia Farid).