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World's biggest YouTuber **PewDiePie** moves to Japan

Swedish gaming streamer PewDiePie

The world's top YouTube star, Swedish gaming streamer PewDiePie, has moved to Japan after the country relaxed its COVID-19 entry rules for some visa-holders. The 32-year-old has a huge online following, with 111 million subscribers on YouTube, but has faced controversy over offensive jokes in the past.

He posted a video this week documenting his arrival with his wife and dogs in Japan, which has some of the strictest virus border controls in the world. "For so

long we doubted whether we could even make this move, and we went through all the ups and downs, and obviously it's been a really long journey," said the streamer, whose real name is Felix Kjellberg. "But I just really, really appreciate everyone who was supportive of us going... it just feels amazing to be here, finally."

Japan has allowed in foreign business visitors, students and other new residents since March but remains closed to tourists, although the prime minister has

pledged a gradual easing of the rules from next month. Details of who will be allowed to enter and when are yet to be announced, although Japanese media reports say group tours may be first to resume and that the government is discussing scrapping COVID-19 testing on arrival.

Japan welcomed a record 31.9 million foreign visitors in 2019 and had been on track to achieve its goal of 40 million in 2020 before the pandemic hit. Kjellberg, who previously lived in Britain, said in

2019 he had bought a house in Japan. The star has landed himself in hot water several times, including over videos containing anti-Semitic remarks and racial slurs, and in 2016 he was temporarily blocked from Twitter after joking he had joined the Islamic State group. Kjellberg also previously said he was "sickened" after hearing that the gunman behind the 2019 New Zealand mosque massacre had promoted his videos before opening fire. — AFP



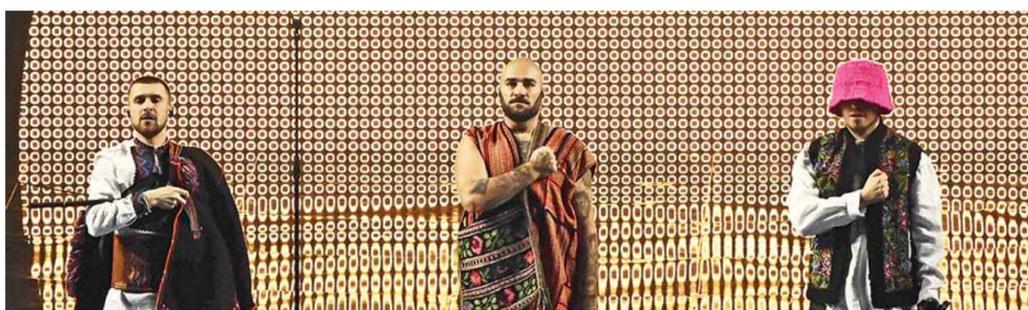
Members of the band "Kalush Orchestra" perform on behalf of Ukraine during the first semifinal of the Eurovision Song contest 2022.

Ukraine's **Kalush Orchestra** throws down motherland's beats at Eurovision

With their infectious musical fusion of roots and rhythm, Ukrainian folk hip-hop band Kalush Orchestra is riding a wave of goodwill at the Eurovision Song Contest this year while eyeing the contest's top prize. Tapping traditional Ukrainian folk music but mashing up an invigorating hip-hop beat with a haunting, lullaby refrain, "Stefania" was written last year by the band's frontman, 27-year-old rapper Oleh Psiuk, as a tribute to his mother. But the song selected to represent Ukraine at Eurovision-just days before Russia's invasion-has taken on outsized meaning for a country nearing its third month of war. It contains nostalgic lyrics such as "I'll always find my way home even if all the roads are destroyed" and celebrates cultural identity and the motherland.

Standing out in the competition long cheered for its flamboyance and camp, the band received a standing ovation on Tuesday after passing the semifinals. It is considered by bookmakers a favourite to become Eurovision's outright winner at the finale on Saturday. "My mum is in Ukraine and many of my relatives are in Ukraine but there is really no safe place in Ukraine at the moment," Psiuk told AFP through an interpreter. "It's really like a lottery, where you cannot know where exactly you'll get in danger. So we are very worried about everyone and our relatives that are in Ukraine."

Such worries have fuelled the band's drive during Eurovision, he said. "We feel here as if on a mission because at the moment, as we speak, Ukrainian culture is being destroyed," Psiuk said. "But it is our



Members of the band "Kalush Orchestra" perform on behalf of Ukraine during the first semifinal of the Eurovision Song contest 2022 at the Palapitour venue in Turin. — AFP photos

role to show it is alive and it has a lot to offer. It's unique. It really represents every Ukrainian who is now suffering in the world today."

Flutes and fusion

Although considered nonpolitical, the world's biggest song contest, watched by millions of people, inevitably reflects greater geopolitical tensions. This year, the European Broadcasting Union banned Russia from the contest a day after it invaded Ukraine on February 24. Russia had competed in Eurovision since 1994. Perhaps the most original and energizing act at this year's competition, the six-member all-male Kalush Orchestra sprang from Psiuk's original hip-hop group Kalush, named for his hometown in western Ukraine. The band is made up of Psiuk, Ihor Didenchuk, Tymofii Muzychuk, Vitalii Duzhyk, Oleksandr Slobodanyk and MC KlymMen ("CarpetMan").

Its new sound incorporates traditional folk instruments, including the telenka, which is played with one hand controlling the pipe's open end, and another flute-like instrument, the sopilka. Performing in richly embroidered traditional garb, the band is also instantly recognizable for Psiuk's bubblegum pink bucket hat and the carpet-like bodysuit worn by the breakdancing MC CarpetMan. But it is Kalush Orchestra's sound that makes the band unique. It "mixes old ancient folk, even forgotten sounds, with super modern and understandable-for-everyone hip-hop rap elements", Psiuk told journalists last week.

'Fighting age'

To win Eurovision, Kalush Orchestra will have to be chosen above 24 other finalists competing on Saturday. Votes are cast by a mix of music industry professionals and the public from each country—who are not allowed to vote for their own nation. Were

Ukraine to win, next year's Eurovision would be held in the country, which Psiuk vowed would be a "new, integrated, well developed, flourishing Ukraine".

Although one band member who joined the army three days after the invasion remains in Ukraine defending Kyiv, Ukraine's government gave the group special dispensation to travel abroad to compete at Eurovision. "That's why we want to be as useful to our country as we can be," Psiuk told journalists. "Representing your country is responsible anytime but representing it in a time of war is... a maximum responsibility for us." Psiuk says the band will return to Ukraine directly after Eurovision. As their press release written ahead of the contest explains: "They will be allowed to leave for the final on 14th May but must return as men of fighting age the day after." — AFP



Members of Ukraine's band "Kalush Orchestra" celebrate their qualification during the first semifinal of the Eurovision Song contest 2022.



Members of Ukraine's band "Kalush Orchestra", Oleh Psiuk, Tymofii Muzychuk, Ihor Didenchuk, Vitalii Duzhyk, Oleksandr Slobodanyk and Vlad Kurochka arrive for the opening ceremony of the Eurovision Song contest 2022.

Rapper sentenced for criticizing president acquitted in DR Congo

A rapper in the Democratic Republic of Congo sentenced to two years in prison for criticizing the president has been acquitted on appeal, his lawyer said on Thursday. A military court in the east of country sentenced Nzanu Muyisa Makasi in December on charges

of insulting the president, for a song called "No President" which suggested the country is ungoverned. Eastern DR Congo is prey to myriad armed groups, many of which are a legacy of regional wars that flared a quarter of a century ago.

Last year, President Felix Tshisekedi placed the eastern North Kivu and Ituri provinces under a "state of siege," putting soldiers and police officers in key administrative positions in a bid to quell the violence. Massacres have continued and rights groups charge that further empowering the security forces has led to abuses against civilians.

On Thursday, Makasi's lawyer Patrick Mukomba told AFP that a military tribunal

in the provincial capital of Goma had acquitted and released the rapper at an appeal hearing the previous day. "The charges against our client were not



Nzanu Muyisa Makasi

established," he said, explaining that criticizing events in the volatile east did not amount to insulting the president. Makasi, 29, is from conflict-torn North Kivu. His father was killed in a 2015 attack in neighboring Ituri province by the Allied Democratic Forces, a militia the Islamic State group describes as its local affiliate in the region.

In December, Makasi was sentenced alongside fellow rapper Idengo-real name Delphin Katembo—who received a 10-year sentence for criticizing the army. Idengo is still in detention. His appeal hearing is scheduled for May 27. — AFP

And action! Swiss seek Netflix rejuvenation for film industry

When it comes to internationally renowned cinema, Switzerland may not be the first country that immediately springs to mind, but a law being voted on this Sunday seeks to change that by forcing streaming services to invest in local moviemaking. The so-called "Lex Netflix" referendum looks set to pass by a narrow margin, according to recent opinion polls. Under Switzerland's famous direct democracy system, voters will decide on an amendment to the Film Production Act adopted by parliament last October.

The change takes into account the dramatic shift in how audiovisual content is consumed, requiring global streaming platforms like Netflix to help finance Swiss film production. The aim is to boost innovation and help Swiss cinema gain more international traction. "Swiss cinema has become much more international. This new step will allow it to go even further," said Swiss director Lionel Baier, whose movie "Continental Drift" has been selected for this year's Cannes Film Festival.

'Raise the bar'

"It will raise the bar in terms of quality and ambition," he told AFP, adding it would push Swiss directors to "imagine that the series or film you are making will be seen on platforms the world over". In a bid to prop up the costly business of film production, domestic television broadcasters have since 2007 been obliged to invest four percent of their turnover in Swiss film-making. But until now, global streaming platforms like Netflix, Disney+ and Blue, which rake in hundreds of millions of dollars in Switzerland each year, have not been asked to pitch in.



Swiss National Film Archives director Frederic Maire answers a question during an interview with AFP in Lausanne. — AFP

If approved, the amended law will submit them to the same rule. The streaming services would be given the choice either to participate directly in Swiss film and series production or pay a substitute levy aimed at financing movie promotion. Cinema production in Switzerland has in recent years received 105 million Swiss francs (\$106 million, 101 million euros) in annual financing on average, according to the culture ministry.

'A boost'

If Lex Netflix passes, the sector can add an additional 18 million francs to its coffers each year, it said. The platforms will also have to ensure European-made films or series make up at least 30 percent of the content available in Switzerland, as they are already required to do in the European Union. Right-leaning opponents of the amendment, who forced the issue to a referendum, have slammed that quota, warning that the likes of Spotify and Apple Music could soon be subjected to a similar rule.

They also warn the investment obligation will hike subscription prices. The culture ministry has rejected that argument, pointing to France, where it says that introducing an obligation to invest up to 25 percent of proceeds had entailed no price increases.

Swiss film library chief Frederic Maire insisted the reform would "give Swiss cinema a boost" thanks to additional funds but also the promise of more distribution of Swiss-produced content. "This can only be beneficial, because... more production means more interesting works and thus, over time, maybe more prizes and more visibility for Swiss cinema," he told AFP. The reform's defenders say it would make it possible to shoot more movies in Switzerland, which would benefit local economies. — AFP