

Björk karaoke marathon boosts anti-takeover

Written by AFP / The Swedish Wire

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REYKJAVIK (AFP) - A karaoke marathon held last week by Icelandic singer Björk helped double the signature count on a petition she hopes will lead to a referendum on foreign ownership of Icelandic natural resources, organisers said Monday.

The Icelandic megastar held a karaoke marathon for nine hours a day Thursday, Friday and Saturday last week along with different Icelandic personalities such as the captain of the country's handball team and comic-turned-Reykjavik-mayor Jon Gnarr.

The aim was to bring more people to sign a petition calling for a referendum on the foreign ownership of natural resources in order to block the sale of Iceland's HS Orka energy group to a Canadian firm.

At the launch of the marathon on Thursday, Björk's petition had 21,000 signatures and as of 5:30 pm (GMT) Monday, 46,863 people had signed it.

"It's nice to wake up and see that more than 46,000 have signed the petition," one of the heads of the campaign, writer Oddny Eir Aevarsdottir, told radio station Saga, adding the success inspired the group to organise karaoke marathons around Iceland next weekend.

Campaigners were aiming for at least 35,000 signatures because Prime Minister Johanna Sigurdardottir had said in a 2009 op-ed on democratic reform that a petition signed about

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35,000 people should be enough to warrant a referendum on any given topic.

Bjork has since July spearheaded a campaign to prevent the takeover of HS Orka by Canada's Magma Energy.

The Canadian company said in May it planned to raise from 43 percent to 98.5 percent its stake in HS Orka -- which produces nine percent of Iceland's electricity -- in what would be the largest foreign investment in Iceland since the country's economy all but collapsed at the end of 2008.

The transaction had received regulatory approval in Iceland but a committee appointed by the government to examine the deal has not yet presented its findings.

"The fight to keep it in the hands of the Icelandic people is not over," Björk said of HS Orka at the launch the event Thursday.

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