

Beijing 2008
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 SUNDAY, AUGUST 10, 2008 | BREAKING NEWS | THEPROVINCE.COM | VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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BEIJING OLYMPICS

SUNDAY, AUGUST 10, 2008



Chinatown joins party

BY MARIA COOTAUCO
 STAFF REPORTER

When Hiroe Li was in Beijing last year on a business trip, the Olympics seemed like a pipe dream for the Chinese city.

"I didn't really believe that they could pull it off," she says.

"But it looks like they're really putting in a lot of effort to implement infrastructure to support the population and the traffic."

Li was one of hundreds of revellers wandering the streets of Vancouver's Chinatown taking in the sounds, sights and smells at the city-sponsored Olympic and Paralympic Games celebration yesterday afternoon.

The event took place alongside the annual Chinatown Festival.

On the main stage, dancers in colourful traditional garb performed a lion dance as onlookers armed with cameras craned their necks to catch a peek.

A quick survey of the crowd indicated many had watched the opening ceremonies but not much else, given the time difference between China and B.C.

For some, the Olympic opener held sentimental value.

June Gou, 39, moved to Vancouver two years ago from China.

"I'm homesick when I watched the Olympics," she said.

But from the little Alan Ho, 27, has seen so far, the grey air hanging over Beijing was difficult to ignore.

"The pollution there is distinctive. If you watch TV, you see in the background that the dust makes it quite blurry," he said over the loud boom of Mongolian music.

There was a more serious tone in front of the Chinese consulate as protesters waved Tibetan flags and called for an end to human rights abuses by the Chinese government.

"Right now, with the Olympics happening, China is very sensitive. They know they're being scrutinized," said Mati Bernabei of the Canada Tibet Committee.

"What we're more concerned about is [that] after the Olympics, the eyes of the world will be off China and the carte-blanche killings of dissidents will continue again."

Sonam, a 29-year-old Tibetan who immigrated to Canada seven years ago and who didn't want to give his last name, said he was participating in the protest to "speak for the people of Tibet who are basically surrounded and besieged by the army in an operation of intimidation and torture."

"We're not expecting dramatic change," he said.

"This is a struggle that has to be continued for many years."

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U.S. tourist murder, threats mar opening

BEIJING — The Olympics were struck by tragedy and controversy yesterday as the brutal murder of an American tourist and angry threats by Georgia to quit the Games overshadowed the first full day of action.

China's capture of two gold medals rapidly lost some of its significance as the huge American squad mourned the father-in-law of men's volleyball coach Hugh McCutcheon, stabbed to death while out sightseeing.

Todd Bachman was attacked as he visited the Drum Tower, a popular tourist site in the city's centre.

The assailant, a 47-year-old man from eastern China, jumped to his death off the monument.

Lang Ping, the coach of the U.S. women's volleyball team, said players were stunned when they heard of the death just before their opening win over Japan.

"Most of the players called their parents," Pang said. "I told them to be strong."

Meanwhile, the bloody turmoil unfolding in the troubled, breakaway region of South

Ossetia came perilously close to sparking a walkout from the Games by Georgia's 35-strong squad in protest at Russia's role in the fighting.

Crisis was only averted when Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili told the squad to stay where they were and take out their anger and frustration in the sporting arenas of the Chinese capital.

Russia and Georgia will come face-to-face at the Olympics Wednesday when they clash in a women's beach volleyball match.

■ There were other controversies on the opening day of the Games.

Greece recalled a track athlete after testing positive for a prohibited performance drug. Greek officials did not name the competitor but local media said it was men's 200 metre runner Tassos Gousis, who denied any wrongdoing.

And in Hong Kong, a pro-Tibet activist was forced to leave the equestrian venue where she had planned to unfurl a Tibetan flag.

— Agence France-Press



HERE TO BEIJING: B.C. shares in the spirit

TOP: Hundreds of locals took part in the Games' first moments by gathering in the atrium of Richmond's Aberdeen Centre at 5 a.m. Friday to watch the Beijing opening ceremonies on big-screen TV. **ABOVE:** Foreign Affairs Minister David Emerson (right) and Premier Gordon Campbell (second from right) present 13 red cedar arches that stand at the entrance to the Canada B.C. Pavilion to the City of Beijing yesterday.

LARRY WONG — CANWEST NEWS SERVICE