

Olympics shine spotlight on China's sordid behaviour

With the passing of the biggest stage in sport, the Olympic Summer Games, has China managed to make the world forget the infringing of human rights?

By Ajitpaul Mangat

*The Manitoban (University
of Manitoba)*

WINNIPEG (CUP) -- Many have proclaimed the 2008 Summer Olympic Games as China's coming out party, the theory being that China would utilize the biggest stage in sports to unequivocally assert itself as the international superpower. After all, its economy is booming, its once rising population is under control, and its athletes appear set to challenge that other international superpower, the United States of America, in terms of gold medals won.

However, things have not quite worked out as planned. Instead, the build-up to the games has, like a trenchant magnifying glass, shined new light on China's shortcomings -- environmental, foreign policy, and freedom of speech issues -- leaving anxious athletes, troubled politicians and journalists, a regretful International Olympic Committee, and an apprehensive rest of humanity wondering whether this decision was a massive error in judgement.

How could the world have foreseen such a divisive build-up to a once superlatively unifying event? After all, the process began as such a rosy affair; Chinese Premier Li Lanqing even

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declared in 2001 that "the winning of the 2008 Olympic bid is an example of the international recognition of China's social stability, economic progress and the healthy life of the Chinese people."

One only needs to smell China's dying roses and contaminated air to recognize the fallacy of such a statement.

The rose-colored glasses are finally off and the sight is none too pretty.

To understand the shortcomings that an average Chinese individual, who is supposed to reside in an international superpower, faces in his or her daily living one only needs to realize that the basic necessities of life, such as clean water and fresh air, and important priv-

ileges, such as electricity, are not always readily available to them.

In fact, Beijing's air pollution has been estimated to be at least two to three times higher than levels deemed safe by the World Health Organization.

As a result, nearby countries, such as Japan and South Korea have decided to set-up off-shore training

facilities for athletes and many countries will be arriving in China as late as possible.

Besides disrupting training and the accommodations of athletes, actual sporting events could be affected by environmental concerns. On July 1, the New York Times reported that an algae outbreak, resulting from pollution and poor water quality, occurred at the city of Qingdao (site of the sailing regatta), which "would pose significant problems to [competitions] if it is not cleaned up."

To make matters worse, Chinese residents will have to face additional shortcomings just so their country can host these Games. For instance, according to the Wall Street Journal, certain parts of the country could face blackouts as concerns over electrical power shortages persist.

With the nation facing major coal shortages, its primary source of electrical power, the province of Guangdong, is expected to be 60 per cent short of its peak energy needs so that the Beijing proper, the Olympic Village, and major sport sites will not lose power.

However, as bad as things are at home, China's foreign policy could be even worse.

See Olympics, Page 8

