

Beijing set for spotlight

China is staging the most expensive opening ceremony in Olympic history today — keen to shine the world spotlight on its modern face.

Displaying its new economic clout, China has invested \$4.3 billion on the Games. Some \$100 million, twice the 2004 Athens bid, has gone on what are set to be spectacular "big bang" opening and closing ceremonies.

They are scheduled to begin at 8:08 p.m. Beijing time (9:08 a.m. Vancouver time).

"My heart is bursting with excitement about the Games," said Zhu Shengjun, a 22-year-old student walking through Tiananmen Square. "I want people to see what is special about China."

Some 15,000 performers and 20,000 fireworks will give the Games a sparkling start inside Beijing's head-turning "bird's nest" Olympic stadium. Here director Zhang Yimou was tasked with condensing 5,000 years of Chinese history into one show.

The best known face of Chinese sport, seven-foot-six NBA player Yao Ming, is to carry the host nation's flag during today's ceremony, which has been ensnared in politics from the outset. Earlier this year, director Steven Spielberg quit as an adviser to protest against China's ties with Sudan.



Performers wait for the 2008 Beijing Olympic torch relay at the Badaling section of the Great Wall on the outskirts of Beijing yesterday. The Summer Olympics begin today. More coverage pages 8, 11.

Games trivia

- Number of medals handed out in the first 25 Summer Games: 12,238
- Number of countries competing at Beijing Olympics, most ever: 205
- Number of Asian cities to have hosted the Summer Games: 3 (Beijing, Tokyo 1964, Seoul 1988)

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Emerson filling in for Harper at Games opening

David Emerson, Vancouver Kingway MP and Foreign Affairs Minister, is attending today's opening ceremony for the Beijing Olympics, standing in for Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

U.S. President George W. Bush is attending, as is B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell.

Emerson notes Harper is not visiting the People's Republic, but has rather encouraged him to improve relations with China which have been strained since the Conservative government came to power in early 2006.

"We've got some momentum going — particularly since the Prime Minister met with President Hu (Himself at the G-8 in Japan)," Emerson told CTV's Queen's Report.

Critics say that while Emerson is a respected member of the Harper cabinet, his presence still doesn't measure up with the Prime Minister attending and that while his reasons for not showing may be legitimate, it is still viewed as a slight by Chinese officials.

Emerson will be in China until Monday.

Olympic parties set for Vancouver

Several events will take place this weekend as the city kicks off the 2008 Olympic Summer Games in Beijing.

The Golden Phoenix Restaurant in East Vancouver will open at 5 a.m. tomorrow and plan the opening ceremonies live on a 1.5 metre screen.

On Saturday, CBC will host an Olympic celebration that coincides with the 5th Annual Vancouver Chinatown Festival in Downtown Vancouver. The event takes place at 2 p.m. at the corners of Keefer and Columbia streets.

Aberdeen Centre in Richmond will also be throwing a party complete with live food and entertainment from 5 to 10 p.m.

Richmond mall celebrates Games

Aberdeen Centre unveils 28-foot TV

ANDREA WOO
 for Metro Vancouver

Olympic fans wanting to celebrate the opening of the 2008 Olympic Summer Games in real-time need look no further than Aberdeen Centre.

From 5 to 10 a.m. tomorrow, the Richmond mall will be holding a celebration complete with Chinese dancing, stage shows and a 28-foot television that will broadcast the Games live.

Ed Gavsie, chair of the Richmond Spirit of B.C. Community Committee, said that the free food and entertainment is a celebration of not just the Beijing Games, but the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver as well.

"This is the lead-up to our Olympics, with Richmond being a venue city,"



Richmond's Aberdeen Centre is hosting an Olympic-themed party today that includes an Olympics broadcast on a 28-foot TV.

he said. "People can also come here to sign up (to volunteer) for 2010."

Joey Kwan, spokeswoman for Aberdeen Centre, echoed the sentiment.

"As soon as they finish, the spotlight is on us," she said.

Other entertainment includes a fashion show, face-painting, stilt-walkers

and games.

Attendees will include the Olympic mascots, 15 past Olympians from Richmond and city councillors Bill McNulty and Cynthia Chen, who will be serving a pancake breakfast.

Richmond Mayor Malcolm Brodie has declared today Beijing 8.8.8 Day in the city.