




Bad News Plagues Beijing Olympics With Algae, Locusts (Update1)

By Grant Clark



[More Photos/Details](#)

July 4 (Bloomberg) -- Beijing Olympic organizers, struggling to clear their algae-choked sailing venue and facing a possible locust invasion, say these latest challenges to next month's games are no ``major problem."

About 10,000 people are scooping algae out of the sea at the eastern city of Qingdao, while officials in Inner Mongolia are preparing to fight off a plague of locusts that may arrive in the capital city during the Olympics.

``There's an old saying in China that good things only come after enduring a lot of hardship," **Jiang Xiaoyu**, vice president of the Beijing organizing committee, said yesterday in Beijing. ``We expected to face many challenges so it's not a surprise. These issues aren't major problems."

So far this year, the world's most populous nation has faced the worst winter snowstorms in 50 years, riots in Lhasa, violent protests about government policies toward Tibet along the Olympic torch relay route in Europe and North America, an earthquake and flooding.

China is still recovering from the Sichuan earthquake that killed more than 69,000 people in May, tempering the run-up to an Olympics billed as the country's coming-out party.

The nation's focus on helping survivors and rebuilding dozens of towns and cities is taking its toll on Olympic-related businesses, said Devin Kao, whose company holds the license to market metal Olympic souvenirs.

‘Bad Things’

Monthly sales of 400,000 Olympic pins or key chains before May have since slumped to 50,000 as companies canceled orders so they could make donations to relief efforts, he said.

``Quite a lot of bad things have happened in China," Kao said in a telephone interview from Shanghai. ``Sales aren't meeting our expectations; it shouldn't be like this."

Advertising spending in China also fell 15 percent in May from April because of the quake, according to **Rita Chan**, executive director for China at rating agency Nielsen Co.

``This is mainly because there was a mourning period of three days in mainland China," she said in a televised interview yesterday. Even Olympics sponsors cut their ad spending, she said.

In Qingdao, host to the five-day sailing event, some 4,000 troops and 6,000 workers have collected 290,000 tons of string-like algae in the past week. The city government is aiming for a return to normal conditions along its coastline by July 15.

‘Full Confidence’

With more than 20 Olympic teams already in town preparing for the games, officials are focusing on clearing the training areas and may use chemicals to speed up the process, Jiang said.

``We've seen algae along the coast of Qingdao before but it's the most serious case in recent years," he said. ``We have full confidence that we can complete the cleanup in time for the competition and the algae won't affect operations."

Local officials blamed the algae bloom on warmer weather, higher rainfall and increased levels of nutrients in the sea, and said about one tenth of the sailing regatta area remains covered.

The northern province of Inner Mongolia has mobilized 33,000 people to repel swarms of locusts, the official **Xinhua news agency** reported. The locusts have come within 430 kilometers (267 miles) of Beijing and infested an area of 1.3 million hectares (5,000 square miles).

Beijing organizers said they are in contact with Inner Mongolian officials to monitor the situation and discuss contingency plans. Cooler-than-usual weather means the hatching of locust eggs in the areas closest to Beijing has been delayed until late July or August.

``Trials and tribulations serve to revitalize a nation," said Peng Zaiwei, a Shenzhen resident who has tickets for the swimming events in Beijing and is visiting the capital to look after his pregnant daughter.

Six months of bad news haven't diminished residents' faith that the games will be a success.

``The trials are problems which could have happened anytime -- before or after the Olympics," said Mu Zhanquan, who works in the capital's central business district. ``But my confidence in a successful Beijing Olympics won't erode."

To contact the reporter on this story: **Grant Clark** in Beijing at gclark@bloomberg.net

Last Updated: July 4, 2008 01:03 EDT

