

Counting Down to the Olympic Crowds in London



AP
Emergency workers practice responding to a terrorist attack during an exercise on the London Underground in February

This is IN THE NEWS in VOA Special English.

The London Olympics are less than one hundred days away. Across the world, many competitors still have to qualify for the sixteen days of competition. Others are entering the final weeks of training.

Three hundred thousand people are expected to travel to the British capital for the Summer Olympic Games. The opening ceremonies are on July twenty-seventh.

Wednesday marked the one-hundred-day point. Sebastian Coe -- the British runner who won two Olympic gold medals -- is chairman of the London 2012 organizing committee.

SEBASTIAN COE: "It signifies, first of all, still an extraordinary amount of work still to do, but I think one hundred days, it means something to people. When you're talking about seven years, six years, five years, four years, but actually when you're really talking about days, and we're talking twelve Wednesdays or something, I mean it really is, it's very close."

The Olympic Park is mostly complete. The Aquatic Center is ready for the likes of American swimmer Michael Phelps. He will attempt to build on his record fourteen Olympic gold medals.

In east London, other Olympic sites are taking shape.

International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge visited the sites and offered an opinion to Prime Minister David Cameron.

JACQUES ROGGE: "There is already, before the Games even begin, a great legacy in east London, a great legacy of the sports venues and this is a tangible legacy. To conclude, prime minister, we are a happy International Olympic Committee. Thank you very much."

But not everyone is happy. On two days this week, immigration lines reached well over ninety minutes at Heathrow, London's main airport. Some travelers expressed their anger and shared photographs on the Internet.

British lawmakers are warning that Olympic visitors could face long waits in immigration lines or on airplanes. The government says it will be ready. A temporary terminal at the airport has been built especially for Olympic competitors.

There are also concerns about traffic on roads and crowds on public transportation during the Games.

Another concern is security. This will be Britain's biggest peacetime security operation ever. The security budget has doubled to eight hundred eighty-two million dollars. In a late addition, the Ministry of Defense is providing thirteen thousand five hundred soldiers for the Games.

David Rubens is a security consultant specializing in the Olympics.

DAVID RUBENS: "It's very difficult to maintain the balance between an open and welcoming event and security management. It's different from what happened in Vancouver, it's certainly different from what happened in Beijing. And the people responsible will be lying awake at night trying to wonder whether they've got that balance right, and the answer is, if it goes wrong, then you got it wrong."

Terrorists are not the only concern. A protester recently halted the historic rowing race between Oxford and Cambridge universities along the River Thames. Trenton Oldfield swam in front of Oxford's boat, forcing the race to be restarted. He said he did it as a protest against what he called "elitist society."

His actions led the chief of the British Olympic Association to warn that it would take "just one idiot" to ruin the Summer Olympics.

The next Olympics are the twenty-fourteen Winter Games in Sochi, Russia. Then come the twenty-sixteen Summer Games in Rio de Janeiro. But first Brazil will hold another of the world's major sporting events: the twenty-fourteen World Cup finals.

And that's IN THE NEWS in VOA Special English. You can watch a video about the preparations for the London Olympics at voaspecialenglish.com. I'm Steve Ember.

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