

Cube becomes park for Olympic stadium revival

By Cui Xiaohuo (China Daily)

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The Water Cube will be home to a huge water park when it reopens in July, in a bid to compete with the Bird's Nest for visitors, its owners have said.

The Olympic aquatics stadium, where swimming prodigy Michael Phelps smashed records by snatching eight Olympic gold medals at the 2008 Olympics, is now undergoing a massive expansion to include water sports amusement facilities, caf parlors, shopping arcades and VIP boxes in the 1.02-billion yuan bubble-wrapped rectangular wonder.

Operators said the revamp will cost 200 million yuan.

"A Canadian company is designing and building these facilities, to make the venue become one of the biggest and most modern water parks in the world," Yang Qiyong, deputy general manager of the Water Cube, also known as the National Aquatics Center, told reporters in a press conference on Tuesday.

The Olympic showpiece attracted more than 100,000 visitors daily in its peak season following the Beijing Games. But without new attractions to maintain visitor enthusiasm, the venue now sees just thousands.

The Water Cube earned 170 million yuan last year through entry tickets sales and commercial events. The profits were less than half of the Beijing Olympics' main stadium, the Bird's Nest, to its east on the Olympic Green.

But Beijing State-owned Assets Management Co Ltd, the major shareholder of the operation company, expects up to 1.8 million visitors to its water novelty in the first year of operation, or 5,000 per day.

If successful, the water park will help operators of the Water Cube earn up to 20 million yuan or more this summer.

Equipped with amusement facilities such as seven-story slides and a wave machine, the venue will become a huge attraction, said Li Aiqing, chairman of the operation company, last week.

Some of the seats of the venue will be removed to allow a total attendance of 6,000 people, operators said.

Caf parlors and leisure centers will be built on both sides of the main swimming pools, operators said, and a performance stage can be set up to host entertainment shows and conventions.

The venue hosted bikini model contests, concerts and conventions last year as part of its commercial operation calendar.

The owners of the venue also revealed that entry tickets to the Olympic attraction will stay unchanged at 30 yuan per head after the new opening, cheaper than the Bird's Nest.

However, entry to the water park will need an extra ticket and the price is still being calculated.

The Bird's Nest is holding a two-month long Snow Festival with skiers having fun inside the stadium on knee-deep artificial snow.

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