

Samaranch not alarmed

MONTE CARLO, Sept 17: Olympic leaders said on Thursday they were confident that opponents of Berlin's 2000 Games bid would not be allowed to disrupt next week's vote to select the host city, reports Reuter.

Speaking 24 hours after a series of explosions outside the Berlin premises of companies, sponsoring the bid, Olympic boss Juan Antonio Samaranch said he was satisfied with security arrangements in Monaco.

Samaranch, president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), will chair a week of IOC meetings in Monte Carlo starting on Friday.

Asked whether the IOC was concerned about the possibility of violent disruption, Samaranch told Reuters: "No, because we trust the organisers. Monaco knows very well how to manage security problems."

Berlin is competing against Sydney, Beijing, Manchester and Istanbul for the right to stage the Millennium Games. But its bid has drawn massive protests from Berlin activists.

who argue that the city should invest money in housing and boosting its economically depressed eastern hinterland rather than the Olympics.

In April anarchists opposed to the bid claimed responsibility



SAMARANCH

for fires inside two department stores and attacks on 29 Berliner Bank branch offices.

Samaranch, who cancelled a scheduled trip to Berlin in May for security reasons, was met by hundreds of demonstrators when he visited the city last month.

IOC director general Francois Carrard said Wednesday's explosions were "highly unfortunate, but not a total surprise."

Security is a crucial issue for the IOC, particularly in Monte Carlo where delegations from the bidding cities will include a number of leading political figures and other VIPs.

Referring to the Berlin explosions, Carrard said: "The possibility of such events was discussed months ago and I would expect the Monaco authorities to be ready to deal with any kind of security risk."

Berlin's opponents have threatened to disrupt the Monte Carlo meetings, but Carrard added: "The people in Monaco are very serious about security matters and the totally aware of all the potential security risks."

The IOC is keen to avoid any repetition of its 1986 session in Lausanne which was disrupted by noisy demonstrations by opponents of Amsterdam's bid for the 1992 Games, which were awarded to Barcelona.

The vote to choose the 2000 Games hosts takes place next Thursday.

Beijing denies programming

MONTE CARLO, Sept 17: China's top Olympic official denied on Wednesday that the release of political prisoners and a recent spate of Chinese world records had been timed to help Beijing secure the 2000 Games, reports Reuter.

Western critics have speculated that the recent release of a number of political dissidents and an unprecedented burst of four women's world record in six days by Chinese runners had been aimed at boosting Beijing's Olympic ambitions.

China has spared no pains in its efforts to obtain the 2000 Games when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) makes its choice next Thursday from five bidding cities — Sydney, Beijing, Manchester, Berlin and Istanbul.

But He Zhenliang, IOC vice president and head of the Chinese National Olympic Committee, said the release of political prisoners and last week's world records were unrelated to the bidding process.

He denied that the release of Tuesday of Wei Jingsheng, one of China's foremost political dissidents, was an attempt to soften up the IOC.

"I'm a bit surprised. When someone is arrested according

to our law, outside people make a lot of noise about human rights," he said.

Then, when we release someone, we are also criticised by those who say we are doing it because of the bid. What should we do? please tell us. Everything we do is according to our law, but people always want to criticise us."

When Wei was freed after serving 14 years of a 15-year sentence imposed for advocating democratic change, diplomats in Beijing said his release was clearly linked to the Stuttgart World Championships last month was achieved by doping.

For those who didn't know about our training methods it was a surprise. I understand that. But what I can't understand is why this is always attributed to doping.

He Zhenliang also scoffed at suggestions that the run of world records by Wang Junxia and Qu Yunzia had been timed to promote Beijing's bid.

They had no connection with the bid. They were the result on many years of effort in track and field," he said.

Referring to the revolutionary endurance training used by coach Ma Junren, he said: "We're not selfish people, we wish to share our experience with others."

The coaches and even the athletes of all other countries are welcome to come to China and undergo the same training programme, if they can endure it."

Lou Dapeng, vice president of the Chinese Athletics Federation, added: "We would like the world to know how we train, that it's not just a matter of taking a few tablets."

She was competing in China's National Games, in which Qu also beat the 13-year-old record for the 1,500 metres.

But he said the dates for the national games had been arranged four years ago, long before the IOC voting schedule was known.

Agassi makes Sampras bite the dust

PHOENIX, Sept 17: Pete Sampras, the first American to win Wimbledon and the US Open in the same year since John McEnroe in 1984, was no match for Andre Agassi, reports AP.

Facing each other in a Thursday night exhibition, Agassi routed the new US Open champ 6-3, 6-4 in just 69 minutes.

Sampras took over the No. 1 ranking in the world after winning the US Open title Sunday. Agassi had lost in the first round, dropping his ATP Tour ranking to No. 20.

But Agassi came out with a crisp serve and was the sharper of the two players Thursday night.

Using his strong serve to win the first set, Agassi wrapped up the match by breaking Sampras twice while winning four straight games in the middle of the second set. He took the lead for good at 4-2 when his forehand volley kissed the netcord and fell over for a winner.

"The serve is something I've been working on and I was happy with it," said Agassi, who will face Sampras again Friday night in Inglewood, Calif. "I have made some forward steps and now I want to keep the ball rolling."

The crowd for 10,239 enjoyed some spirited rallies as well as good-natured clowning from both players, who each made dls 50,000 to dls 75,000 for the night.

"I haven't picked up a racket since Sunday. I went down to Florida and relaxed," said Sampras, who wrestled the world's top ranking away from Jim Courier. "Winning a tournament like Wimbledon and then coming back to win the Open makes this a season to remember."

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