

Call for apolitic approach

MONTE CARLO, Monaco, Sept 20: IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch urged members Monday to remain free of political pressure when they choose the host city of the 2000 Olympic Games, reports AP.

The US House of Representatives, human rights organizations and other groups have lobbied the IOC to reject Beijing's Olympic bid because of China's human rights record.

Beijing is considered a front runner in the race, which will be decided by a secret IOC ballot on Thursday. The other candidates are Berlin; Istanbul; Turkey; Manchester, England; and Sydney, Australia.

"The competition will be very close between these cities of equal merit," Samaranch said in a speech marking the opening of the IOC's 101st session. "For the first time, all the constituent parts of the Olympic movement — the IOC, the National Olympic Committees and international federations — will submit together their reports before the vote."

"Everything has been done to ensure that the IOC members

can make their choice, completely independent of political and financial pressure. At the end of the day, only the interests of the athletes and of the Olympic movement count."

Samaranch closed his speech with what he described as a personal message for each of the 90 eligible voting members.

"In the next few days, you will take very important decisions," he said, "I know you will make them in complete freedom, true to your conscience and fully aware of the consequences."

"We have hosted the Olympics, in 1964.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) will vote in Monte Carlo on Thursday to decide who will host the Games. The other bidders are Berlin, Istanbul, Manchester and Sydney.

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Samaranch lauded the strength of the modern Olympic movement as it approaches its 100th anniversary next year.

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"The effect of the appeal by the OCA, the governing body of the Olympic movements in Asia, will be marginal as there are only 14 IOC members from the continent.

Beijing appears to be one of the front-runners despite political pressure by opponents of China's human rights policies.

The US House of Representatives and the European Parliament have both opposed Beijing's bid on human rights grounds.

There is also opposition within Asia, including protest marches by Tibetan exiles in several Indian cities.

Some 5000 Tibetans, opposed to Chinese rule in their Himalayan homeland, marched through the southern city of Bangalore on Sunday to urge the IOC not to choose Beijing.

Lamark, wearing a T-shirt with the slogan "Olympics 2000 — not in China," said the police told them on Sunday they could make their protest — but not outside in the streets.

Other Tibetans at the news conference said they would try to lobby IOC members between now and Thursday to stop Beijing being selected over its human rights record in Tibet.

Tsawang Phuntsok, an India-based exile from the Tibetan Youth Congress, said: "For me and my people, Beijing is a regime of suppression and repression. My country was invaded in 1949 and there have been constant human rights violations in Tibet."

He said one-fifth of the population — more than a million people — had died as a result of Chinese rule and said a population transfer of China into Tibet had turned Tibetans into a discriminated-against

minority in their own homeland.

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