

Samaranch slates US stance

MONTE CARLO, Sept 21: Olympics chief Juan Antonio Samaranch criticised American politicians on Monday for opposing Beijing's bid to host the 2000 Games, reports Reuter.

In an interview with the French Daily *Le Monde*, Samaranch said he was aware of arguments in the US House of Representatives resolution opposing the bid on human rights grounds.

But he added: "We find it difficult to understand why a country, that has given China Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to develop its trade within, asks us today not to give it the Games."

The House resolution came after US President Bill Clinton decided to renew China's MFN trading status for another year but said renewal in 1994 would depend on progress in the human rights field.

The row over China's rights record has since deepened, with a senior Chinese Olympic official saying last week that Chinese athletes could boycott the 1996 Games in Atlanta if Beijing lost Thursday's vote. Chinese officials have since denied the threat.

Samaranch told *Le Monde*: "We respect everyone's point of view. There are those who judge that awarding the Games to China would be a recognition of its regime and its lack of respect for human rights."

"Others say that one should look to the example of what happened in Seoul in 1988. The organisation of the Games brought fantastic political and economic changes for Korea. A country that hosts the Games must open itself up for seven years to all types of media and all sorts of visitors."

"It is difficult to predict all the consequences."

Featuring women's soccer in Atlanta Games hailed

WASHINGTON, Sept 21: International Olympic Committee approval of women's football as a medal sport for the 1996 Atlanta Games was hailed by the US interests that pushed for the sport's inclusion, reports AFP.

"This announcement is another great step for women's soccer in the world," US soccer secretary general Hank Steinbrenner said.

The US team won the first women's FIFA World Women's Championship in 1991 in China.

"Playing in the Olympics will allow women's soccer to be exposed to an entirely new audience," said Linda Grant, Director of the sport's US development committee. "To Americans, the Olympics ring closer to home than many other international world championships."

There are more than five million female US soccer players. The most celebrated is Michelle Akers-Stahl, the leading scorer for the triumphant 1991 squad.

"I have always craved the opportunity to play in the Olympics," she said. "It is great for women's soccer around the world."

Papal support for Beijing bid

BEIJING, Sept 21: A special papal envoy during a visit to China has backed Beijing's bid for the 2000 Olympics, Xinhua news agency said Tuesday quoting the Foreign Ministry, reports AFP.

Cardinal Roger Etchegaray made the comment during the opening ceremony for China's National Games September 4, the official news agency said.

Beijing broke relations with the Vatican in 1957.

"We are delighted to hear the message and we appreciate the comments by the French Cardinal, who ended his official visit recently, a ministry spokesman was quoted as saying."

The International Olympic Committee is due to announce the winning bid September 23 from among Beijing, Sydney, Manchester, Berlin and Istanbul.

Salt Lake City named candidate for 2002 Games

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colorado, Sept 21: Salt Lake City, runner-up for the 1998 Winter Olympics, was officially nominated on Monday as a candidate for the 2002 Games, reports AFP.

Nagano will stage the 1998 event. Salt Lake City, selected several months ago as the US bid site, will have another chance when the International Olympic Committee decides a 2002 host in June of 1995.

"Salt Lake City has demonstrated tremendous community support for its Olympic effort, as well as a solid commitment to the construction of winter sports facilities," US Olympic Committee president Dr Leroy Walker said.

Olympism's moment of truth

MONTE CARLO, Sept 21: The Olympic movement faces its moment of truth on Thursday when it selects the host city for the Millennium Games in the year 2000, reports Reuter.

The Mandarins of the International Olympic

daily media diet of Chinese human rights violations, would believe the Olympic governors had taken leave of their senses.

But some factions within the IOC believe a Beijing Olympics would exert a significant positive influence on human rights in China.

You'd have seven years of unrelenting foreign involvement

Even some of Sydney's normally buoyant supporters are starting to wonder whether they might have been over-matched in their battle with Beijing.

A slightly defensive note has crept into Sydney's style at its daily media briefings in contrast to its usually polished demeanor.

If there has been a criticism of



Members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) enter the Sport Palace early yesterday for the 101st session. During this session the IOC members will decide which city would host the 2000 Games.

— AFP photo

Committee (IOC) have the option to go with the tide of history and pick Beijing, arguably the most politically significant bid ever mounted.

Or they could pay heed to their own lofty ideal of putting the athletes first and send the Games to Sydney, whose facilities have been described by an IOC official as technically near-perfect.

The long shot is Manchester which has, in Olympic terms, shaken off some of its grimy 19th century industrial image by virtue of a well-managed bid. But it would take an unimaginable collapse by the two front-runners for Manchester to pull off an upset.

The remaining candidates, Berlin and Istanbul, are regarded as no-hoppers.

From the IOC's standpoint, giving the nod to Beijing in the face of political opposition from the US and Europe would send a powerful signal that the Olympic movement will not succumb to outside political interference in its affairs.

But the IOC is also painfully aware that awarding the Games to Beijing would provoke a howl of fury from opponents of China's human rights policies.

Even Monday's announcement that China had agreed to allow a foreign investigation them to inspect human rights conditions was greeted with scepticism by human rights activists who believed the probe would founder once Beijing and obtained the games.

In the meantime, neither the general controversy over human rights, specific charges that the release of political prisoners was timed to bolster the bid nor a short lived threat to boycott the 1996 Atlanta Games appear to have slowed the Beijing Juggernaut.

Some Olympic observers in

Sydney's performance in Monte Carlo, it has been that the Australians have been too slick and too reminiscent of the approach which earned Atlanta the 1996 Centenary Games three years ago.

Berlin has continued to maintain that it would be a safe Olympic host — despite the thousands of opponents demonstrating on the streets of the German capital — while Istanbul has been the least visible of the five candidates in Monte Carlo.

As well as the usual posse of royalty who provide the IOC with the blue-blooded image it so relishes, the Olympic battle will be joined on Thursday by a parade of Prime Minister seeking to sway the vote — Paul Keating of Australia, John Major of Britain and Tansu Ciller of Turkey.

Each candidate city will make an hour-long final presentation to the IOC on Thursday.

Ninety of the 91 IOC members are in Monte Carlo, with only Bulgarian Ivan Slavkov missing. Slavkov son-in-law of Bulgaria's ousted communist dictator Todor Zhivkov, is under investigation for alleged misappropriation of state funds and has had his passport confiscated.

With IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch not taking part in the ballot, 89 member will vote. The winning city will require an absolute majority of 45.

At 2020 local (1820 GMT) Samaranch will step into the spotlight at Monaco's Louis II Stadium, reopen the envelope containing the result and possibly ignite a fuse that could fizzle for the next seven years.

The ACOG also announced on Monday that it had selected four cities to host the preliminary and quarter-final stages of the soccer competitions.

It named the cities as Birmingham (Alabama), Miami and Orlando (Florida), and the US federal capital of Washington, DC. The Miami matches will be held in the Orange Bowl, better known for hosting American football games.

Each city will host six matches for men and three in the inaugural women's soccer tournament.

Atlanta won the right to host the 1996 centennial Games three years ago, beating among others the Greek capital Athens, site of the first modern Olympiad in 1996.

The International Olympic Committee is due to choose the hosts for the 2000 Games in Monte Carlo on Thursday.

Stakes are high for China

BEIJING, Sept 21: "The Chinese people have stood up," Mao Tse-tung announced in 1949, as he proclaimed the creation of the Chinese Communist State.

More than four decades later, China's leaders and its 1.2 billion people are looking to Thursday's selection of the venue for the 2000 Olympics for confirmation that the country has truly taken its place on the world stage, reports Reuter.

"It would be an honour for the nation," said the owner of a noodle restaurant. They say only increase the gap between Beijing and other cities.

Those who oppose argue that it will be too expensive, with much of the burden falling on ordinary people," said one elderly man, a long-time Christian.

Did he oppose it himself? Shrugging his shoulders and looking round, he said nervously: "I do not dare to say."

Opponents argue that China is too poor to afford such an expensive event and would do better spending its money on poor, backward areas. They say only increase the gap between Beijing and other cities.

"We want the Olympics as a matter of prestige, to show our place in the world," said a man working in a bank. "As it was for Japan and South Korea, it would be a sign of the world's recognition of what we have achieved."

Tokyo and Seoul hosted the Olympics in 1964 and 1988 respectively. Melbourne had the Games in 1956.

The authorities are treating the vote as an epoch-making event at home and a measure of China's growing stature in the world.

Monaco police refused to comment on the incident although on Sunday another source said the man was suspected of sounding out security before next Thursday's meeting to decide where the 2000 Games will be held.

A sports official at the National Games, which ended last week in Beijing, said: "Please, do not judge us by the Beijing you see in 1993. If you do that, we will probably lose the bid."

Uwe Rada, a photographer for the *Tages Zeitung* paper which opposes Berlin's bid, was arrested on Monday after exposing his accreditation pass with another photographer in order to go up to Samaranch's floor.

"Please, have faith in us to improve our city by the year 2000."

Protocol gums up Berlin's works

BERLIN, Sept 21: Berlin officials said on Monday they had failed to persuade German President Richard von Weizsaecker to present their bid for the 2000 Olympics to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), reports Reuter.

The IOC will select the venue for the Summer Games on Thursday evening in Monte Carlo after the five competing cities — Sydney, Beijing, Manchester, Istanbul and Berlin — make their final presentations.

"President von Weizsaecker will definitely not take part," said Ulrich Eggestein, a Berlin government spokesman. "He said he did not want to go. He has said it would be inappropriate because cities, and not countries, bid for the Games."

Pressure for Von Weizsaecker to take part had grown in Germany in recent weeks because the heads of government of Australia, Britain, and Turkey will all be in Monte Carlo to lead their respective bids.

"We don't want to make a big deal about it. But it would very much help Berlin's presentation if he were to take part," Azel Nawrocki, Chairman of Berlin's organising committee, told the *Berliner Morgenpost* newspaper on Monday.

The highest ranking official to take a seat on the eight-member German panel, which includes tennis star Steffi Graf and swimming champion Franziska van Almick, will be Interior Minister Manfred Kanther.

ACOG plans to shift soccer venues

MONTE CARLO, Sept 21: The organisers of the 1996 Atlanta Games said on Monday they were planning to move the final of the Olympic soccer tournaments to Athens — in Georgia, reports Reuter.

There's no other way than

continuing to point out why it would be good to hold the Games in Sydney and at the end of it all we would hope that the message gets across."

"We make no apologies for our position that we clearly see ourselves as the athletes' Games," Bruce Baird, the New

South Wales minister in charge of Sydney's bid, added.

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gaining ground that no matter how good a bid Sydney presented it could not resist the powerful symbol presented by Beijing.

A straw poll of members taken by AFP on Tuesday suggested many were responsive to the argument that a vote for Beijing would hasten the pace of change in China."

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IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch said in his opening speech to the 101st session on Monday that athletes' interests

Aussie economy & Olympics

SYDNEY, Sept 21: Hosting the 2000 Olympics would be a multi-billion dollar boost for the Australian economy, reviving business confidence and refuelling the country's flagging construction and retail industries, economists said, reports Reuter.

Although many analysts are hesitant to speculate exactly how much money will trickle in from the Games and which companies will benefit most, they said the sheer number of domestic contracts from the Games will be a boon to many Australian-based firms.

The country's construction industry, currently suffering from a commercial property market glut, would be among the first sectors to feel the benefits from the Olympics, followed by manufacturers, retailers and service industries, analysts say.

"If we win the Olympic Games there would be an immediate lift in the stock market," said Michael Heffernan, head of research at BOS stockbroking in Sydney. Some analysts see a quick 40 to 50 point surge in the market on Friday if Sydney wins the vote.

Consultants KPMG Peat Marwick estimate the Olympics would inject as much as Australian dollar 8 billion (US dollar 5.2 billion) into the Australian economy, mostly after 1997 and concentrated heavily in the country's economic engine, New South Wales.

But once the day arrives for the Games to begin, retailers stand to gain about A dollar 1.24 billion (US dollar 806 million).

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