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Greek greetings: President Jiang Zemin greets Greek Prime Minister Constantine Simitis in Beijing yesterday.

Sino-Hellenic ties race forward

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President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji yesterday both expressed China's willingness to co-operate with Greece in all fields, including organizing the Olympic Games.

They made the remarks in separate meetings with Greek Prime Minister Constantine Simitis.

Zhu said that the two countries should keep up the momentum of their contacts in an effort to further promote understanding and to work for a sound and balanced development of bilateral economic and trade relations.

He told his guests that China and Greece should go

beyond the official level and encourage people-to-people contact in expanded exchanges in tourism, culture, science and high technology, according to a spokeswoman with the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

The two countries can also join hands in organizing the Olympic Games and make the event a cultural occasion, Zhu added.

Athens will be the host country of the Olympic Games in 2004 while Beijing won the bid to hold the games in 2008.

Simitis arrived in Beijing on Sunday, marking the first visit by a Greek prime minister to China in 16 years. His six-day trip will also take him to the history-rich city of Xi'an in

Northwest China and the nation's commercial hub, Shanghai.

Referring to the ancient cultures of the two countries as a "bridge" of understanding between them, Simitis said the common goal of the two countries is to develop economic opportunities to further strengthen ties between the two.

Great opportunities still abound for Greece and China in trade and economic ties, said Simitis, adding that his country is willing to enhance exchanges with China in culture, tourism, agriculture and the Olympic Games.

His vision holds great promise, as the two countries, marking the 30th anniversary of their diplomatic ties this year,

have conducted what Chinese President Jiang Zemin has described as "fruitful" co-operation in economy, trade, culture, science and technology in the past.

Jiang, during a separate meeting with Simitis earlier yesterday, said that the Chinese Government attaches importance to Sino-Greek friendship.

According to the Chinese spokeswoman, Simitis told his Chinese hosts yesterday that Greece supported closer ties between the European Union (EU) and China now that China has achieved great success in economic and social development.

Greece will be the EU rotating chairman for the first half of next year.