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Olympic Games**Alarm as Athens struggles to meet Games deadline****By Mihir Bose
in Athens**

GREEK Prime Minister Costas Simitis has told the International Olympic Committee that he needs help to better co-ordinate Government efforts to complete projects in time for the 2004 Athens Olympics.

The IOC are so concerned about lack of co-ordination in building sports facilities that they commissioned a special report three weeks ago.

The report's contents "alarmed" Denis Oswald, chairman of the co-ordination commission for the Games. Yesterday Oswald's commission ended a three-day visit to Athens. Oswald, expressing concern about delays, said: "It could affect the ability of the organisers to have test events before the Olympics."

The first of these, in yachting, is only 10 months away. Oswald said the only solution was "full co-operation between the different parties. Each party could make more effort to inspire this co-operation."

The IOC solution would be for the Greek Government to

appoint an equivalent of Michael Knight who, as Olympic Minister, masterminded Sydney. But Simitis has ruled that out. It would add another level of bureaucracy to an already complex situation.

Lack of co-ordination has led to fears that, in some sports, athletes might practise on surfaces different to those used in competition. Under the rules, both surfaces should be the same but it is understood the problem has arisen in basketball and badminton. In athletics, the Greeks are trying to overcome the problem of having warm-up areas with different surfaces to the main stadium.

Construction, the sole responsibility of the Greek government, is split between two government departments, the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Sport. And there is nobody willing to co-ordinate efforts. To add to the construction headaches, there are problems with local residents. In Galatsi, where the table tennis and rhythmic gymnastics are to take place, residents have protested

about the use of a park to build an indoor stadium. The government have agreed to put up temporary stadiums.

In Markopulo, where the equestrian events are to be staged, locals are incensed by the price paid for their land. A month ago, 2,000 farmers tore down fences that enclosed the proposed equestrian centre.

There are also accommodation problems. Athens could be 4,500 beds short. The plan is to house people on cruise ships in the Port of Piraeus.

To compound all this, Simitis is in the middle of a political crisis and in mid-October there is to be an emergency party convention to decide whether he remains head of the ruling Pasok party.

Oswald said: "In a way I will be happy when this convention is over. Convention ministers are more concerned about the convention than the Olympic Project."

Oswald's comments reflect the level of concern, with the IOC aware they cannot take the games away from Athens - but they also cannot be sure they will come right.