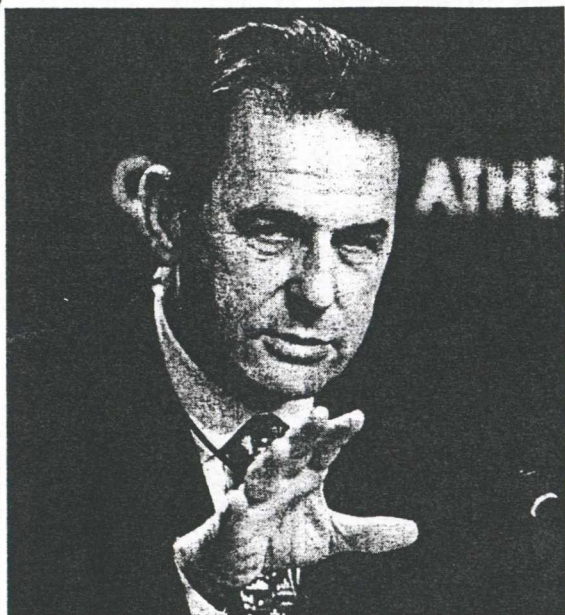


F.T 17-18/2/2001 p. 3



Jacques Rogge, chairman of the IOC co-ordinating commission for the 2004 Olympics, urged Greece to speed up construction Reuters

Pressure on Greek PM over Olympics

By Kerin Hope in Athens

Costas Simitis, the Greek prime minister, who has taken personal responsibility for making the 2004 Olympics in Athens a success, is already under pressure to live up to his promise.

Officials from the International Olympic Committee, in Athens this week to inspect preparations for the games, were told that contracts had still to be awarded for building 25 per cent of the sports venues as well as the Olympic village, intended to house 17,000 athletes and trainers.

Jacques Rogge, chairman of the IOC co-ordinating commission for the 2004 Olympics, said yesterday the games would definitely be

held in Athens. But he warned their success would depend on sports facilities being ready to hold test events several months in advance.

"There are problems, and the deadlines are tight," he said. "But we can address them."

Mr Rogge said he urged the prime minister to approve construction of a new 7km underground railway line to improve access to the main Olympic sports complex in northern Athens.

Plans for the Dr150bn (\$4.1m) metro extension, which would also serve a fast-growing business district near the stadium, had been frozen because of a dispute over the proposed route.

Mr Rogge said it was "sheer coincidence" that a flurry of tenders for games-related projects, including the Olympic village, were published the day before the Commission's arrival in Athens. But he set clear deadlines for the start of

construction of two indoor sports halls in low-income districts of the capital, which have been delayed by objections from local residents.

"When we next visit Athens in May, we want to see buildings emerging from the ground," he said.

Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki, president of Athoc 2004, the body organising the Games, called for more flexibility in decision-making by government organisations in charge of building sports

venues and access roads. "We've lost time. The system has to work at the speed of the private sector," she said.

Mrs Daskalaki was reportedly rebuked by the prime minister this week for suggesting that administrative procedures should be simplified for Olympic projects.

■ Mr Simitis said yesterday the new Athens international airport would open on March 28, ending speculation over when the \$2bn facility would be ready to receive commercial flights.