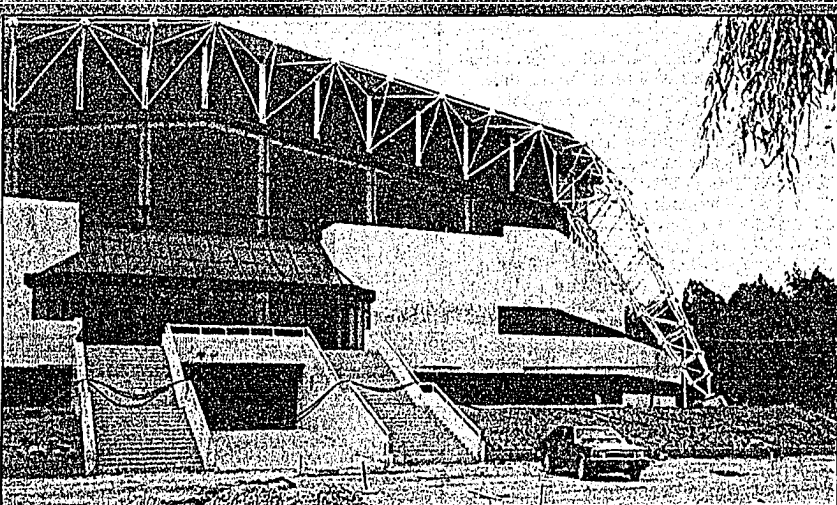
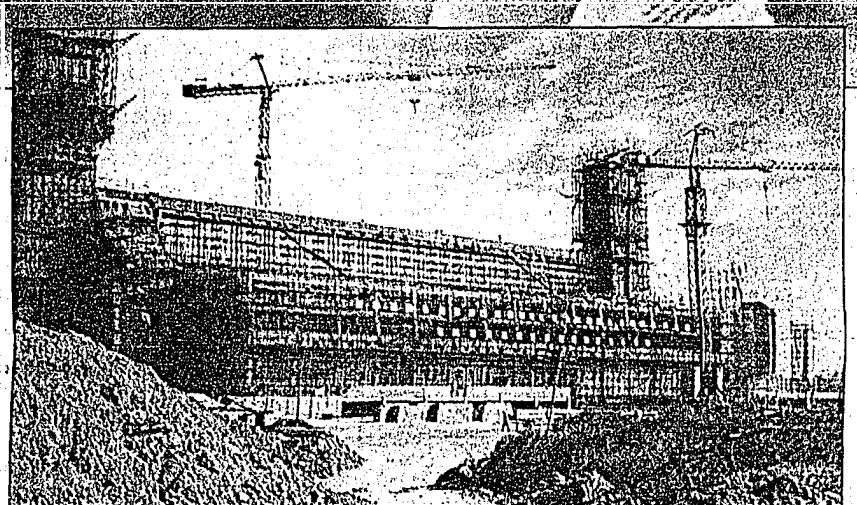


BEIJING BUILDS

GAMES SPIRIT



□ Left: The gymnasium at the Institute of Physical Education, which will be the boxing venue for the Asian Games, is almost complete.



□ Right: Work is well underway on the swimming pool and gymnasium in Beijing for the Games.

ON A dusty wind-swept construction site some eight kilometres to the north of Beijing's Tiananmen Square, the first stage of China's Olympic dream is slowly becoming a reality.

This is the home of the 1990 Asian Games, the largest international sporting event ever to be held in China, and seen by the Chinese Government as a trial run for the Olympic Games in the year 2000. China, who officially applied to host the Olympics last year, has set aside land on the Asian Games site with that goal in mind.

However, the first priority remains the forthcoming Asiad. The basic skeletal structure of the main stadium complex is already in place, a collection of vast concrete monoliths, clad in scaffolding and tended by giant cranes.

When completed towards the end of 1989, these as yet only dimly recognisable structures will have been transformed into a major athletics arena, a highly futuristic water sports stadium and a multi-purpose gymnasium, plus numerous practice facilities.

Yet even if the building and infrastructure work is completed on time, there still remains a great deal of landscaping to be done before the complex can be made presentable for the opening of the games in September 1990. Where the planners envisage an ornamental lake and rolling lawns, there stands nothing but hard earth and a few shrubs.

To the north of the stadium complex lies the athletes village, home for more than 6,000 athletes and officials during the games. When finished the village will contain apartment and office buildings, shops, hotels, plus an international conference centre which will act as the main press centre during the games.

To help finance the village project, the Asiad's organising committee is building more than 50 office and apartment buildings on the land adjacent to the village for sale to Chinese government organisations and ministries. After the games in 1990, the apartments inside the village will be sold to foreign customers, according to Mr Huo Jinglin, vice-director of the village project.

There is, however, a considerable over-supply of office

Host city Beijing is gearing up for the staging of China's largest international sporting event – the Asian Games – to be held in 1990. Site construction is well

underway with ornamental lakes, rolling lawns and a futuristic water sports stadium taking shape. GEOFFREY CROTHALL reports from Beijing.

space in Beijing and it is a problem that is likely to be aggravated when the new World Trade Centre is completed next year. Nevertheless, arrangements have been made with Chinese organisations to buy much of the already completed apartment space adjacent to the village, and according to Beijing Television News, several European companies have agreed to rent property in the village itself.

Despite assurances from the games organising committee that "we are racing like mad" to complete the village project on time, there is a decided absence of frenzied activity. Often the place appears deserted. Further inspection occasionally reveals small groups of workmen quietly working on specific projects.

The situation was the same at many of the outlying stadiums and gymnasiums being built for the Asiad. At the nearly completed boxing arena, way out beyond the old Summer Palace, the foreman said that there were more than 200 people employed on the site, yet there seemed to be about 50, only 20 of whom seemed to be doing any work.

A worker, when asked why so few people appeared to be doing anything, pointed his finger to the sky. "The higher ups," he said. "We can't do anything until the boss says so, and half the time the boss can't tell us to do anything because he can't get the supplies."

However, the myriad bureaucratic and administrative hurdles that inevitably accompany any building work in Beijing have not prevented any of the 16 separate construction projects from getting underway and some, such as the shooting range in the Western Hills, have already been completed.

The importance attached to the Asian Games, both by the Beijing municipal government and the national government, has opened many doors that may have remained closed to less significant ventures.

Overall responsibility for construction work has been assumed by the Beijing Urban

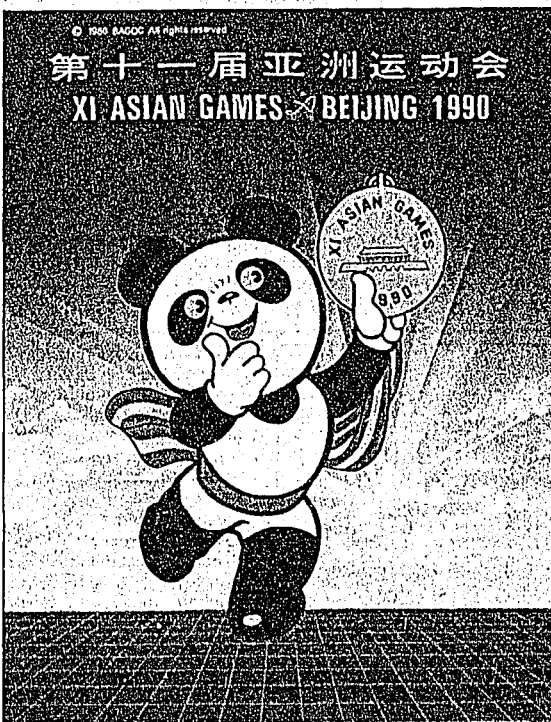
Construction and Development Corporation directly under the supervision of the games organising committee, which features such notables as Vice-Premier and noted tennis player Mr Wan Li, the Mayor of Beijing Mr Chen Xitong, and the Director of the Sports Commission Mr Li Fanhua.

In addition, three different government ministries have taken over responsibility for installing the computer and telecommunications systems for the games.

Another committee has been established to raise money for the Asiad, headed by China's "number one capitalist" and chairman of the

domestic banks providing an additional 400 million in loans. The rest of the money is expected to come from foreign bank loans, corporate donations and fund raising activities.

The Asiad's fund raisers have been particularly active in Hongkong. Patriotic members of the Chinese business community have been enticed to donate money for the games by the thought that anyone who donates enough money to build a 2,000-seat gymnasium will have the gymnasium named after them. People giving 10 million yuan or more to the Asiad will have a special memorial built for them in one of the stadiums.



China International Trust and Investment Corporation, Mr Rong Yiren.

The total investment in the Asian Games is expected to exceed two billion yuan (one yuan is HK\$2.1). So far the central government has only supplied 700 million yuan, with

In May this year, Mr Henry Y. T. Fok, a leading Hongkong businessman and a member of the standing committee of China's National People's Congress, gave the Asiad a much needed shot in the arm by pledging HK\$100 million and a further HK\$20 million for

preparations for a future Olympics in China.

Several Chinese companies have sponsored the games in return for advertising rights. The most notable supporter of the Asian Games, and of sports in China generally, has been the Jianlibao group, makers of "China's number one sports drink".

For an as yet undisclosed sum, Jianlibao has acquired the right to be designated official sports drink at the 1990 Asian Games.

In addition, several well known artists and writers have donated their work to the Asiad. In July, representatives of China's last royal family donated 160 scrolls from their private collection to help raise money for the games.

Yet, despite a massive publicity campaign – hardly a night goes by without the local and national television news informing viewers of the good work being done by the games organising committee – the public seems remarkably uninterested in the affair.

Several workers on the Asiad's construction sites, asked whether they were looking forward to the games, confessed they never really thought about it; to them it was just another job. One was more blunt, "No," he said, "I hate sport!"

Despite public apathy, China's leaders are keener than ever to make a success of the Asian Games. The international prestige acquired by South Korea after the Seoul Olympics has reconfirmed the long-term political and economic benefits that can be gained from staging a major sporting event.

As Mr Rong Yiren puts it, "The capability of China to host such a large scale international sports meeting once again attests to the fact that the Chinese can no longer be called 'the sick men of Asia'."

"Our success in international competition has boosted the morale of the entire nation and given us the confidence to move up and join the other sporting powerhouses in the world," he said.

China's leaders are all too aware of the need to rekindle the patriotic spirit that brought them to power in 1949 and thereby help to restore the public's faith in the Communist Party. The 1990 Asian Games are doubly important to China, because if the games aren't a success they can effectively wave goodbye to their Olympic dream for the foreseeable future.

For the Asiad to be a success, three major obstacles have still to be overcome: water supply, transport and telecommunications.

Beijing is an arid place – the city never has enough water except in summer when it is subject to floods. Water supply is

irregular at the best of times and as any Beijing resident will attest, the water pressure is never quite sufficient to ensure there is water in the taps, for any one living on the top floor of a building, whether it be a four-storey walk up or a 25-storey high rise.

However, the 130 kilometres of pipes being laid down in the athletes village should ensure a reasonable supply; at times of shortage the village will always have priority over its neighbours.

● Continued Spectrum 4

Beijing builds games spirit

● From Spectrum 1

To help ease Beijing's chronic traffic congestion, a six-lane highway bisecting the main stadium complex and the village is being built to link the village with Beijing's Capital Airport. Two more roads are being built to link the village with the city centre. A subway link is under construction but an official from the organising committee admits it is unlikely that it will be finished in time for the games.

Travel to and from the numerous outlying stadiums still remains a serious problem. The municipal government has invested considerable time and money on road building projects in the last few years,

and traffic congestion has eased noticeably. Whether sufficient improvements can be made to ensure a smooth flow of athletes and officials during the games remains to be seen.

Beijing's telephone system is overloaded and hopelessly out of date. If the Asiad were to rely on the existing network it would very rapidly grind to a halt. To help ease the problem, Northern Telecom of Canada has donated US\$3.5 million (US\$1 is HK\$7.8) worth of digital telecommunications equipment to link the various venues during the games and form part of the existing telephone network.

To help beam pictures of the Asiad around the world, an international broadcasting centre

is under construction. The 405 metre high transmission tower is already a prominent feature of Beijing's northern skyline.

Officials of the organising committee remain confident that most if not all the projects will be completed in time for the games. Shortage of money is unlikely to be a problem. Although the central government has said it will only invest 700 million yuan in the Asiad, it is doubtful whether such a prestigious project will be allowed to run out of money.

Mr Shao Shiwei from the Asiad's press office says: "It's difficult to say just at the moment what proportion of the total investment in the games will come from the central govern-

ment ... but conditions in China are such that if money is needed, either the central or municipal government will find it."

And Mr Shao is quietly confident that a successful Asiad will lead to China being awarded the 27th Olympiad in 2000. "It is our great hope that we can host the Olympics and we are confident of the support of other Third World countries in our bid."

The main competition for the 27th Olympiad comes from Paris. But after Olympiads in Barcelona, and probably Greece, the International Olympic Committee may well decide against a third European venue.