



headline news: Oil - what a rip off

Internet censorship a mute point in Beijing

(article taken from www.ioltechnology.co.za)

Stephen Wade

IOC president Jacques Rogge was accused of backtracking on promises of press freedoms on Saturday and some Internet sites remained blocked less than a week before the Beijing Games begin.

Under pressure from the International Olympic Committee, Chinese organisers unblocked some sites at the main press centre and venues, but others remained censored for journalists covering the Summer Games.

"Let me be very clear on this," said Rogge, speaking publicly for the first time since arriving in Beijing on Thursday. "We require that different media have the fullest access possible to report on the Olympic Games. And I'm adamant in saying there has been no deal whatsoever to accept restrictions. Our requirements are the same from host city to host city and remain unchanged since the IOC entered into a host city contract with Beijing in 2001."

Chinese officials and high-ranking IOC members have repeatedly said there would be no censorship on the Internet for accredited journalists covering the games - even though Chinese authorities regularly block sites used by its citizens.

"I'm not going to make an apology for something that the IOC is not responsible for," Rogge said "We are not running the Internet in China. The Chinese authorities are running the Internet."

During an IOC news conference earlier Saturday, Rogge was quoted as saying "foreign media will be able to report freely and publish their work freely in China. There will be no censorship on the Internet."

IOC spokesperson Giselle Davies suggested that Rogge, who is Belgian, may not have been precise when he spoke of "no censorship" because he was speaking in English, not his native tongue.

"There's been no change in the IOC's position," she said. "Again, I think we are trying to hang on every single word often spoken by people whose mother tongue isn't English. Let me be clear again: The IOC would like to see open access for the media to be able to do their job."

In 2001, when China won the right to host the games, Wang Wei, the organising committee's executive vice president, was widely quoted as saying, "We will give the media complete freedom to report when they come to China."

A check by The Associated Press on Saturday showed many sites the Chinese government dislikes - for example, the spiritual movement Falun Gong - were blocked. The sites being blocked seem to change daily, although certain key words always draw blank screens. Sites that host thousands of blogs are also routinely blocked.

Typing in "Tiananmen Square Massacre" yielded a site, but all the photographs on the site were blocked. Kevan Gosper, head of the IOC's press commission, has acknowledged that full access may not be possible with the games being held in a "communist society."

"I guess there will be some debate as we move toward the games if there are sites that may or may not be open," Gosper said. "And the line between what could be considered as a national-interest issue might be a bit blurred. But we'll work on it and we will deal with any potential grievances."

Meantime, some TV officials have complained about limited live access to Tiananmen Square, red-tape rules that hinder the movement of cameras and reporters and the critical allocation of broadcast frequencies.

"We are continuing to work to have the organizers deliver what has been pledged, what has been outlined," Davies said. "And they have also assured us of this." - Sapa-AP

