

Clinton thinks politically

LOS ANGELES, July 10: US President Bill Clinton, who extended his stay in California to attend the Women's World Cup final in Pasadena, told CNN Friday he hoped the game would help improve strained US ties with China, reports AFP.

"It should remind people in both countries that we need to build a peaceful future together," Clinton said.

"Relations have been constructive" during the recent years, Clinton said. "We should resume that path."

US-China relations nose-dived after the NATO planes bombed Beijing's embassy in Belgrade on May 7, an incident Clinton said was an accident and a "tragic mistake."

Relations were also strained by allegations that China stole US nuclear secrets, charges detailed in a May congressional report. Beijing has denied all the charges.

Clinton also said the success of the US women's team had boosted soccer's popularity in the United States and put female athletes in the spotlight.

"This has been a phenomenal thing for women's sports," he said.

Scimeca's denial

LONDON, July 10: Aston Villa central defender Ricardo Scimeca on Saturday pledged to fight for his first team place in the English Premiership side despite reports linking him with a move to relegated Blackburn, reports AFP.

The former England under-21 captain attracted the interest of Rovers last season when he was viewed as part of a possible exchange deal for Chris Sutton.

Now the Ewood Park outfit are thought to be keen to secure him as a replacement for Stephane Henchoz who has moved to Liverpool.

But Scimeca, who asked for a transfer in September but later came off the list, is determined to battle for a spot at Villa despite competition from the likes of Gareth Southgate, Ugo Ehiogu, Colin Calderwood and Gareth Barry.

The son of an Italian restauranteur in Birmingham said: "I came off the list because I felt more settled and now everything is going well in pre-season training and I am determined to fight for my place."

The manager said when we reported back that no-one is guaranteed to be in the team. Competition is important at any club and it means I have a fair chance along with everyone else."

"I knew Blackburn were interested towards the end of last season. It's flattering to think another club might want you but I signed a four-year contract last summer and I'm happy at Villa. I would like to think my future is here but you never know what the manager is thinking."

Bridge deal collapses

LONDON, July 10: Sunderland striker Michael Bridge's four million pound (6.4 million dollars) move to English Premiership side Tottenham collapsed on Saturday, reports AFP.

The 20-year-old was placed on the transfer list 10 days ago and Spurs' bid had been accepted by Sunderland.

But in a statement the club confirmed that Spurs had pulled out after negotiations with the player and his agent.

"The club are surprised that Michael has not grasped the opportunity to play at a club of Spurs' stature and that he is not satisfied with their offers," the Sunderland statement read.

"As a result of this latest development, we intend to let the matter settle for a few days before talking to Michael about his future again later in the week."

The club believes it has dealt with Michael Bridges and his agent with the highest integrity and we hope there is no hidden agenda."

"Should Michael want to stay at Sunderland Football Club we would be delighted."

The news of Spurs' withdrawal will offer renewed hope to Leeds, who appeared to have been gumped by George Graham having offered around three million pounds (4.8 million dollars) for the England under-21 star.

Bridges would have been Graham's third signing of the summer. Central defender Chris Perry moved from Wimbledon for four million pounds (6.4 million dollars) last week, and the former Leeds boss has also secured the services of Dutch winger Willem Korsten.

Match-fixing 5 to be tried in Vietnam

HANOI, July 10: Five people, including three players, will be put on trial for alleged match fixing, a Ho Chi Minh City court official said, reports AFP.

All five people, who were arrested last year, will be charged with gambling and could face up to three years in jail, an official from the Ho Chi Minh City prosecutor's office said.

Truong Van Duong and Nguyen Phuc Nguyen Chuong from the Ho Chi Minh City customs department team are charged with conspiring with Ding The Nam of the Haiphong police team in fixing at least two matches in the 1997 national championships.

The three players have suffered 9,300 dollars in illegal gains, the Saigon Giaphong newspaper reported.



The Chinese women's team pose during a photo session ahead of their match against the USA. — AFP photo

</