

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 nosedived 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 Riccardo 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 Exposed 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 restaurant owner," 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 Bridges' 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 believe 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 gazzumped 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 today, 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.

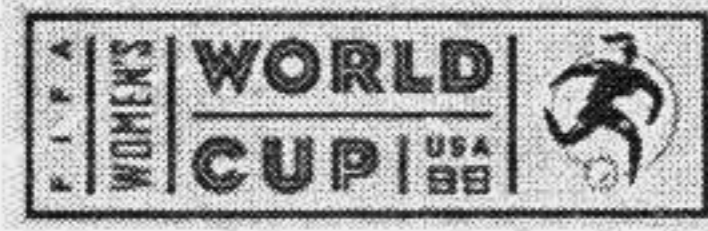
Truong Van Duong and Nguyen Phuc Nguyen Chuong from the Ho Chi Minh City customs department team are charged with conspiring with Ding The Nam of the Haiphong police team in fixing at least two matches in the 1997 national championships.

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



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

Trial by television



NEW YORK, July 10 (Reuters): The Women's World Cup has been getting major TV and newspaper play in the United States, but in many other countries, where soccer is the sport of men, the tournament is barely a blip on the sporting radar screen.

Ratings on US television have been high and last Sunday's US-Brazil was watched in an estimated 2.9 million homes — more than any other soccer match ever on cable's ESPN.

But in much of South America, it didn't help that the Copa America championship is going on in Paraguay and drawing the attention away from the women's game in soccer powerhouses like Brazil and Argentina.

Most of Europe has given the tournament scant coverage, while Britain — which first drew up the rules of soccer last century — has virtually ignored the women's championship, even though it is organised by the world body FIFA.

China, which plays the United States in today's final, is one exception to the general homophobia. Chinese state television has carried all the

team's games and many soccer fans have vowed to stay awake until 4:00 am Sunday Beijing time to watch the final from Pasadena, California.

Newspapers have hung on every pronouncement by coach Ma Yuanan and on each meal eaten by the players.

Even Cabinet minister Wu Yi paused during a speech on agriculture to tell her audience China was four goals ahead in the July 4 semifinal against defending champions Norway. China finally won 5-0.

That contrasts with Britain, where little attention has been paid. Regular TV has not carried games and only cable's Eurosport has said anything about the World Cup. Normally ravenous tabloids have also passed on the spectacle.

Media interest in another soccer power, Germany, grew perceptibly as the Germans advanced and highlights were played on TV news. But the newspapers virtually ignored it and interest tailed off altogether after Germany was beaten by the Americans in the quarter finals.

Italy too has generally ignored the women, preferring to concentrate on the frenzied close-season transfer market. But Gazzetta dello Sport, the respected daily sports newspaper, published full results, standings and tables throughout the

tournament with occasional match reports.

Women are making inroads in Italy, however, and next season Carolina Morace, a former international, will take over as coach of men's semi-professional Serie C team Viterbese.

In Brazil, the men's Copa America games and Ronaldo's playing crisis ebbed aside the women's advance to the semifinal. When the Cup did make it to TV or the papers, there was more emphasis on the women's physical appearance than their game. Some of the short hair or shaven heads of the Brazilian women got play as did the looks of US star Mia Hamm.

Norwegian media covered their team's games, but captain Linda Medalen grabbed as many headlines for her campaign for sexual equality and gay rights as the soccer itself.

After scoring one goal, Medalen pulled her shirt up over her head, revealing her bra, and ran around the field in celebration, mimicking male players. Norway's top-selling daily Verdens Gang carried a front-page picture of her celebrating, calling it a blow for women's equality.

Medalen, 34, also used the World Cup to tell Norwegians that she is a lesbian. "I can't stand living in hiding any longer," she told an interviewer.

Author of China spy report to miss WC final

WASHINGTON, July 10 (AFP): He may be the keenest soccer fan in Congress, but the legislator who wrote a controversial report on Chinese nuclear spying has to miss the women's World Cup final Saturday pitting China against the United States.

"I'd love to be at the World Cup game in Pasadena, but I'm committed to be in San Diego instead," Representative Christopher Cox, a Republican from southern California, told the news agency.

"I'll make a big effort to keep track of the game on the radio or television, if I can get near a television," said Cox, whose home district is about an hour's drive from Pasadena.

Cox played soccer as an undergraduate at the University of Southern California and says he worked hard to help bring the men's World Cup to the United States as a White House staffer in the 1980s.

He went on to law school and business school at Harvard University in Boston before running for Congress in 1988.

As a member of the Lower House of Representatives, Cox has drawn national attention for his relentless opposition to President Bill Clinton's policy of engagement with China.

In May, the Select Committee he chaired released its long-awaited report on alleged Chinese nuclear spying, which claims that Beijing has engaged in a sustained and successful campaign to steal US nuclear weapons secrets.

Leeds, England, July 10: Highlighting English Premiership side Leeds United agreed a fee of 4.5 million pounds (7.5 million dollars) with rivals Chelsea for their highly rated central defender Michael Duberry on Friday, reports AFP.

That fee could rise to 5 million pounds depending on appearances — but the 23-year-old player has not yet agreed personal terms with the club, who finished fourth in the Premiership last season and qualified for next season's revamped UEFA Cup.

Duberry was seen as an outstanding prospect when he first came into the Chelsea team but has been kept out of the starting line-up by French World Cup winning defender Marcel Desailly and Frank Leboeuf.

Leeds chairman Peter Ridsdale said: "We have agreed terms with Chelsea and we will be talking to Michael Duberry's agent on Monday."

Should Duberry agree personal terms it will be further evidence of Leeds' youth strategy as their other major signing of the close season was Charlton Athletic's promising England under-21 defender Danny Mills for 4 million pounds.

Leeds agree to let Duberry go

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Atletico, Lazio both own Lopez?

MADRID, July 10: Atletico Madrid and Lazio have agreed an unusual "co-ownership" deal in order to prise Argentine international striker Claudio Lopez away from Valencia, Spanish state television reported on Friday, reports Reuters.

According to the reports, the Spanish and Italian clubs will between them pay the 3,800 million peseta (23.32 million dollars) buy — out clause of Lopez — if the player agrees to the deal.

The pact between the two clubs would see Lopez play the next two years for Atletico before moving on a three-year contract to Lazio.

Atletico managing director Miguel Angel Gil, whose club was not prepared to buy out the player's contract on their own, flew to Rome on Friday to discuss the deal, which also works in Lazio's favour as at the moment they do not have room for another non-European Union player on their books. Atletico were not immediately available to comment on the reports of a deal, but Gil had said before travelling to Rome, "If there is any chance of coming to an arrangement with Lazio to share the player then we'd do it."

Lopez, who signed for Valencia from Racing Avellanada in 1996, has been in great demand after an excellent season which saw him score 21 league goals. He is currently on holiday in Argentina.

A move to Atletico would see him rejoin his former coach Claudio Ranieri, who is due to take over the reins at the Madrid club next week.

That game ended in confusion as Costa sat down, thinking he had served an ace to break. The shot was ruled out, so the eighth seed played the point again, quickly reaffirming his scoreline.

Costa clinched his place in the final on a chip volley winner.

"I had to keep him on the baseline to neutralise his forehand," said Costa, who showed that he has been working on his own game by coming to the net occasionally.

"I'm trying to play more aggressive, I need to impose my game more," he said.

Gstaad is one of two alpine club events on the ATP Tour. The other is played at the ski resort of Kitzbuhel, Austria, later in the month.

Costa owns a pair of Kitzbuhel titles to go with his Gstaad trophy from three years ago.

And if history is anything to go by he's starting at a second, with Spaniards having won seven of eight titles here, with only a 1995 trophy by Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov interrupting the series.

Costa levelled his career mark against world No. 33 El Aynaoui at 1-1 with the victory in one hour 50 minutes.

The Spaniard admitted that he'd had trouble coping with the Moroccan surprise packet's serve.

"He served unbelievable," said No. 28 Costa, one of 11 Spanish players in the ATP Tour Top 100 and a man who will likely return in the Top 20 if he wins here Sunday.

"I tried to light on the court, I had to move to his forehand, it was an exciting match and a tight tiebreaker."

The 24-year-old Costa now stands 22-11 for 1999 and has lost only three matches at Gstaad. All of his three career titles — the last at Estoril in April — have come on clay.

The Spaniard levelled the match as he won the second set tiebreaker, then broke in the third game for 4-2.

World Student Games

Warkentin denied fifth

PALMA DE MALLORCA, Spain, July 10: Mark Warkentin, exhausted by his previous heroics, was denied a record-equalling fifth swimming gold medal when he could finish only fourth in the 1,500 metres freestyle at the World Student Games on Friday, reports Reuters.

The 20-year-old American had earlier won gold in the 200, 400 and 800 metres freestyle and 4x200 metres freestyle relay and needed one more to match the five achieved at a single Games by Hungary's Martha Egervari in 1963, American Jill Sterkel in 1981 and Romania's Noemi Lung in 1987.

But the 1,500 — the longest pool event in swimming — proved a race too far for the University of Southern California student.

Italy's Andrea Righi, silver medalist behind Warkentin in Wednesday's 400 freestyle, won the 1,500 in 15 minutes 25.83.

American Mark Leonard took the silver in 15:28.06 and Spain's Daniel Vidal the bronze in 15:28.95, with Warkentin just behind them in 15:29.54.

Japan's Noriko Inada swam the fastest women's 100 metres backstroke of the year and set a Games record of 1:01.06, beating the 1:01.60 set in 1991 by American Barbara Bedford.

Defending champion Inada, 20, turned in 30.12 seconds and finished more than a second clear of Japanese teammate Tomoko Hagihara, who clocked 1:02.23 to add one more silver to the three golds and one silver she collected earlier in the week.

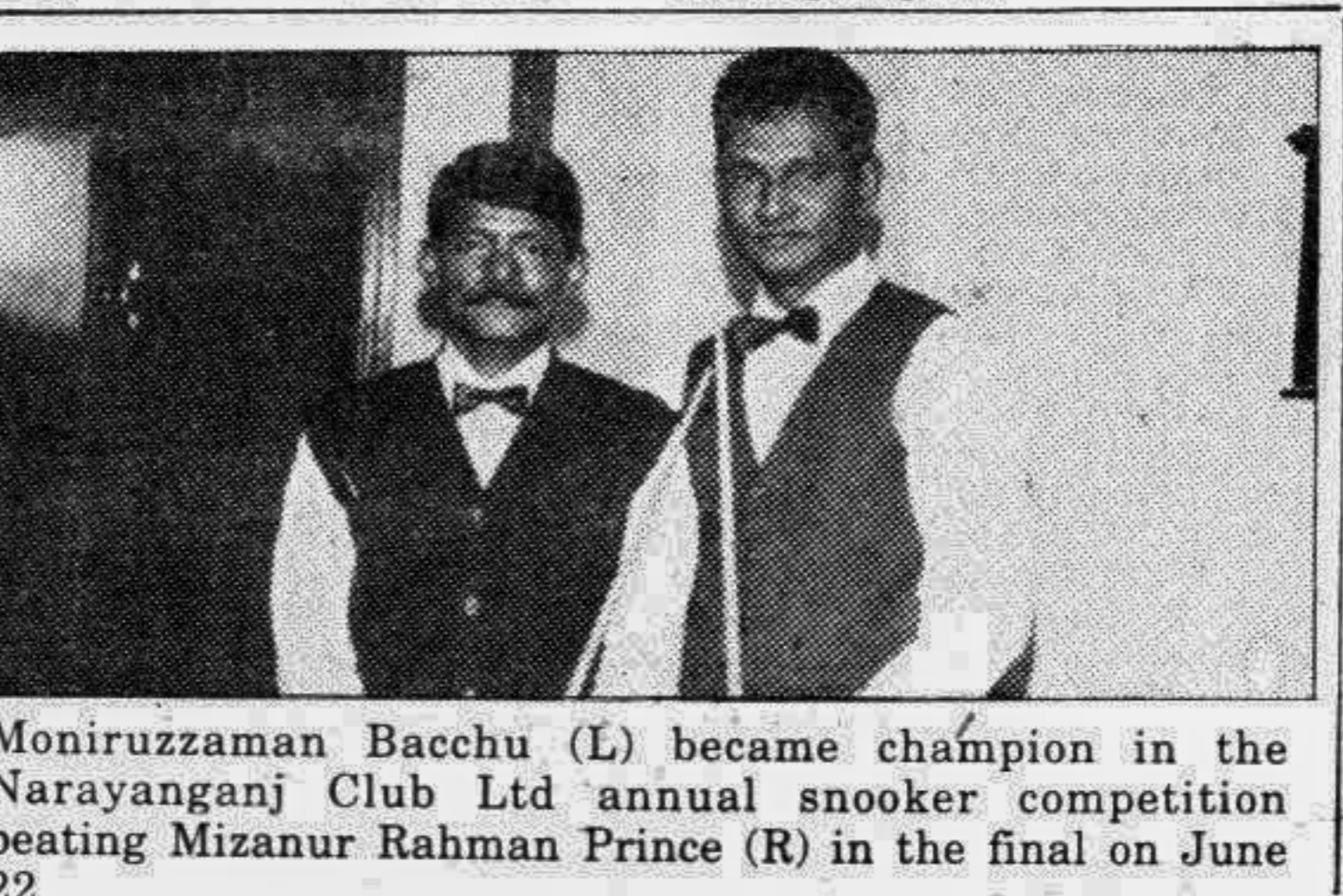
"My aim is to cut my time down to a minute, I missed the Atlanta (Olympic) Games and now I really feel I have a chance for Sydney," Inada said, looking ahead to the 2000 Olympics.

"I won the gold at the 1995 Pan-Pacs but I have been quite slow since then, so this comes as a big surprise."

China's He Cihong set the current world record of 1:00.16 at the 1994 world championships in Rome.

In the athletics stadium, Romania's Mihaela Melinte, who holds the women's hammer world record of 75.97 metres, demolished her Student Games record by more than four metres to win the event with a third-round throw of 74.24.

MEDALS TABLE			
Country	G	S	B
United States	20	8	12
Russia	13	12	8
Japan	8	8	11
China	4	5	7
Romania	4	3	0
Cuba	4	1	4
Italy	3	7	2
Ukraine	2	6	6
Australia	2	3	2
France	2	3	0
Czech Rep	2	2	2
Netherlands	2	2	0
S Africa	2	0	1
Canada	1	2	4
Belgium	1	1	0
Spain	1	0	7
Portugal	1	0	0
S Korea	0	2	4
Poland	0	2	2
Britain	0	1	2
Austria	0	1	1
Germany	0	1	1
Hungary	0	1	0
Israel	0	1	0
Uzbekistan	0	1	0
Brazil	0	0	2
Argentina	0	0	1
Denmark	0	0	1
Georgia	0	0	1
Greece	0	0	1
Switzerland	0	0	1



Moniruzzaman Bacchu (L) became champion in the Narayanang Club Ltd annual snooker competition beating Mizanur Rahman Prince (R) in the final on June 22.



Members of the American Women's World Cup squad being put through their paces at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena on July 9. — AFP photo

Organisers feel blessed



LOS ANGELES, July 10: In Marla Messing's wildest dreams, the Rose Bowl would be filled on July 10, just like nearly every other stadium was when the United States played a women's World Cup game, reports AFP.

And in those dreams, clearly the two best teams in the tournament would be playing for the championship. One of those squads, from the host United States, would have captured the fancy of the nation, transcending what has been a history-making event.

Hey Marla, stop dreaming. It all came true.

"The last two weeks have been an absolutely exhilarating experience," Messing, president of the organizing committee, said Wednesday. "As big as I thought this tournament could be, it has been bigger."

"We have established the FIFA Women's World Cup as a world-class, world-caliber, stand-alone event like no other in sports."

Unquestionably, this has

been the most successful women's sports events ever staged. More than 650,000 tickets have been sold. Organizers spent more than \$100 million, but will make a tiny profit.

Most significantly, women's soccer has established itself as a coming sport — perhaps not in countries where cultural and societal limitations are placed on what women can achieve, but certainly in many of the nations that participated. Led by the United States, of course.

"It's been a stupendous tournament," FIFA spokesman Keith Cooper said. "It's the level of enthusiasm, which is partly due to the success of the American team and the media reaction. If others are smart, they should think this stuff is hot and learn from USA '99 and see how the game has gained respectability and popularity."

Television ratings have been strong, with the biggest audience yet almost certain for the China-United States final. No American men's soccer game, not even the World Cup second-round match against Brazil, grabbed the headlines as has the women's run to the title game.

"It's been like a cultural shift," Messing said, "and the way the tournament caught fire, we've tipped into something. We think this will be a seminal moment that people will look back in 20 years and say, 'That event is responsible for the development of women's sports.'"

The tournament has been such a success that it could scare off bidders for the future. Cooper acknowledged that Australia is the only nation to submit a plan to play host to the 2003 Women's World Cup. He admitted FIFA isn't expecting much interest from elsewhere.

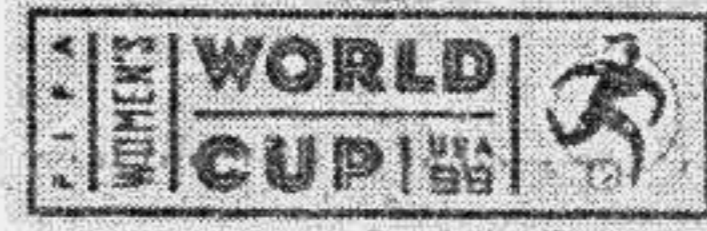
"This is not a hard act to follow, it is an impossible act to follow," Cooper said. "We shouldn't be so foolish as to think this will happen again."

Messing believes it can happen again — and again.

The tangible result will be that the FIFA Women's World Cup will be a significant property," she said. "I believe all around the world we have inspired girls to get involved in soccer, in other sports."

"I can't think of another stand-alone women's event that has been as big as this, by all barometers we use to judge events."

Sleepless Beijing



BEIJING, July 10: China is set for a sleepless night today as millions of fans tune in to watch the Women's World Cup soccer final between their national team and the United States, reports Reuters.

A poll by the popular Beijing Youth Daily found that 91.4 per cent of those surveyed planned to watch the match in Pasadena, California, on state television at 4:00 am Sunday Beijing time (2000 GMT Saturday).

Confidence was high, the survey said — 100 per cent of the men from the 116 households polled said China would win and so did 94.1 per cent of the women.

Despite a lack of the advertising bombardment that surrounded the men's World Cup last year, China's women's team has picked up a loyal following as they advanced through the tournament with a string of high-scoring victories.

For the fans, it was a welcome change from the repeated heartbreak they have suffered from the performance of the men's team, which has never won even a regional championship despite being cheered on by a soccer-mad nation of 1.2 billion people.

"I can't stand to watch our men's games any more," lamented Yu Rongquan, a stockbroker who said, he changed travel plans to watch the women's final.

"They can't even get out of Asia while the women's team is in a world championship game," the avid weekend player lamented over a glass of beer.

Even women who do not normally follow sports have

No quotas yet in S African sport

JOHANNESBURG, July 10: South African Sports Minister Ngconde Balfour said Thursday he would refrain from imposing quotas to ensure proper racial representation in South African national teams, reports AFP.

But he will summon South Africa's major sports federations, including the governing bodies of rugby, cricket and athletics, to a meeting to seek their formal commitment to transformation.

Such a commitment, Balfour said, would effectively impose "for want of a better word, performance contracts" on the sports bodies, to ensure they were toeing the line of implementing transformation.

They will be given time frames on how to achieve this without changing their programmes.

"It is this ministry's policy to have national representivity teams selected on merit," Balfour told a press conference in Johannesburg.

But he added that it would be unacceptable to be unable to recognise whether a team comes from this continent or Europe.

"What is at issue is that national federations are not doing enough on the opportunities-creation front," said the former provincial rugby administrator named in new President Thabo Mbeki's cabinet last month.

"Unless this practice is changed, it will be unfair to talk about merit as one cannot have merit in the absence of opportunities."

"The issue of representivity in team selections is too important to be left to the goodwill of sports bodies alone," he said.

But Balfour seemed keen to steer clear of confrontation with the associations in advance of the meeting.

Celta set to get Turdo

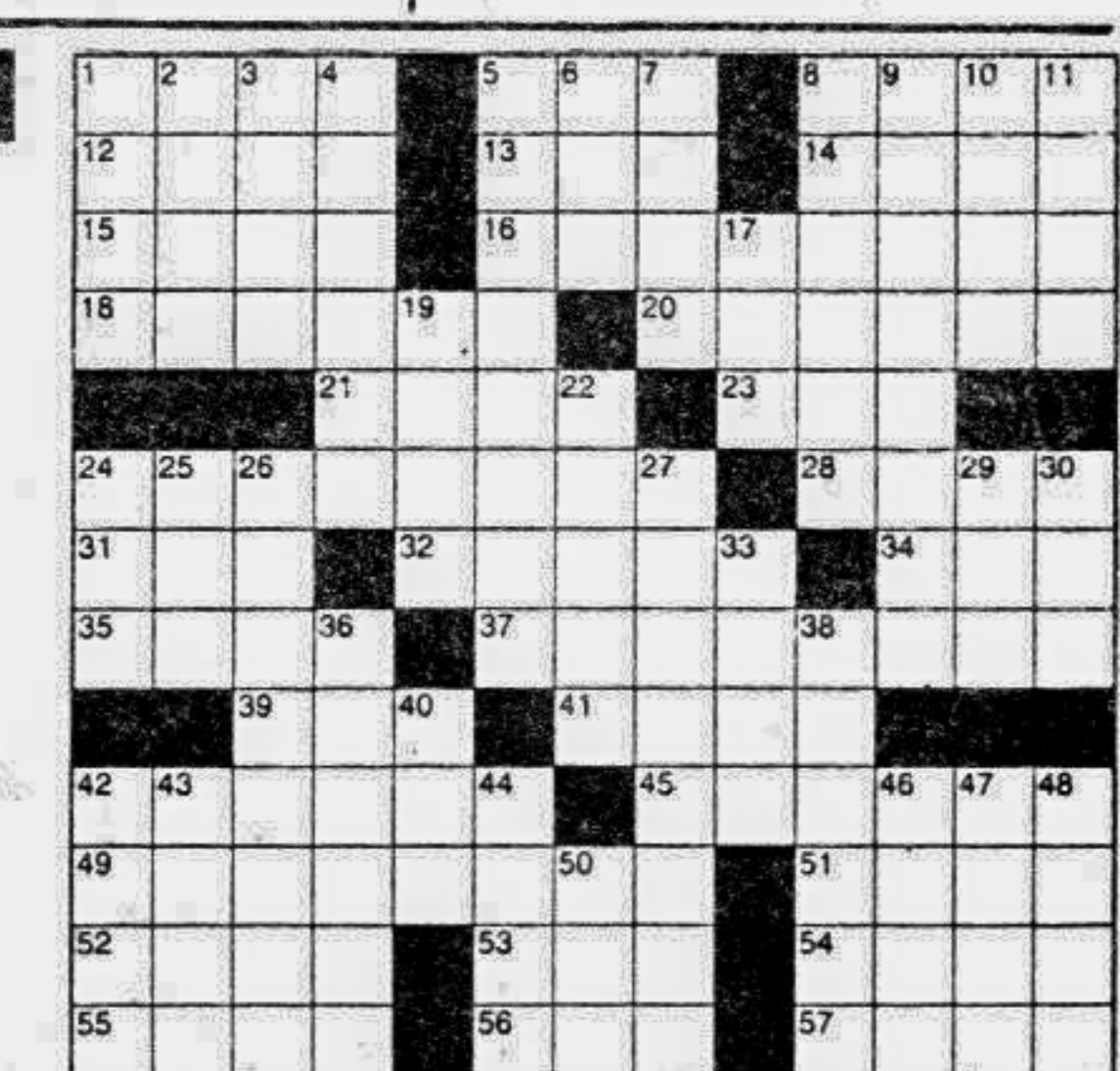
BUENOS AIRES, July 10: Independent striker Mario Turdo was Saturday set to sign for Spanish outfit Celta Vigo for 3.5 million dollars, reports AFP.

Turdo, who holds a French passport, is the third regular to leave Independiente — coached by former national coach Cesar Menotti — within days, with defender Pablo Rotchen having already signed for Spain's Espanyol and striker Mauricio Hanuch having moved to Sporting Lisbon.

Vigo will play in next season's UEFA Cup.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	37 Actress Janeane Garofalo	56 R.N.'s readings	10 Gangster's gal
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34 Jim precursor			46 Implement
35 Egg container?			47 Pull an all-nighter
			48 Coop group
			50 Pizzazz



CRYPTOQUIP

QNTJXANST YNJVU KJDXEYH
QNTMA VRFNV R AD
UAXH NS FMRRK MDAREU
Saturday's Cryptogram: THESE HUNGRY ARCHAEOLOGISTS AT A RESTAURANT LOUDLY CRIED, "LET'S DIG IN!"

Today's Cryptogram clue: K equals P

The Cryptogram is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.