

Messi to lead Argentina against Australia in China friendly

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Online Desk: Lionel Messi will lead world champions Argentina in a friendly against Australia in Beijing, the country said on Monday, followed by another game in Indonesia. The clash on June 15 at the Workers' Stadium in the Chinese capital is a rematch of Argentina and Australia's meeting in the last 16 of the Qatar World Cup.

Messi scored in a 2-1 win for Argentina and they went on to win the World Cup. "On June 15, Lionel Messi will lead the Argentinian national team in a friendly against Australia in Beijing," the South American country's embassy in China said on the Twitter-like Weibo.

Separately, the national team also announced another friendly, against Indonesia in Jakarta on June 19, as part of a summer "Asia Tour". Football Australia chief executive James Johnson said playing in China will further boost ties between the two countries after years of troubled relations.

"Football is truly the global game and for Australia to be invited to play this match in China, and against the world number one, we hope this will open further opportunities for our two nations to work together both on and off the football field," Johnson said.

"It's been 15 years since our senior men's national team played in China and we are truly excited to be returning to face Argentina at the newly renovated Workers' Stadium in Beijing," he added. International sport has only just begun to return to China after Beijing abruptly ditched strict virus curbs late last year.