

FROM DIEGO MARADONA'S HAND OF GOD TO A NATION'S SONG, ALL FOR THE FOURTH STAR

Football anthem turns up political pitch

The Telegraph
AT THE WORLD CUP



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Atlanta: Two words, buried in the third verse of a football anthem, have done what a dozen pre-match press conferences could not: they have dragged a 44-year-old war back into the conversation, days before a ball is even kicked.

As Argentina prepare to face England in Wednesday's World Cup semi-final in

Atlanta (12.30am IST Thursday), the terraces are reverberating to a new anthem — *La Cuarta Estrella, The Fourth Star*, an allusion to a fourth World Cup title. It is fast becoming the soundtrack of the defending champions' campaign. One line in particular has lit the fuse, sung in chorus: *Por Malvinas, por el Diego, por la última de Leo, Argentina, quiero verte bicampeón* — "For the Malvinas, for Diego, for Leo's final cup, Argentina, I want to see you two-time champions."

Argentina's players have been singing and swaying to it in the dressing room after each of their last two wins, against Egypt and Switzerland, with the country's football association

gleefully broadcasting the celebrations to millions online. The anthem needed no introduction after that. But it is the reference to Malvinas — the Spanish name for the Falkland Islands — that has turned a victory song into something sharper.

The Falklands, a British overseas territory around 480km east of the coast of Argentina, remain one of the longest-running sovereignty disputes in modern history, contested by London and Buenos Aires for over two centuries. That dispute boiled over into open war in 1982: an Argentine invasion on April 2 prompted Britain to dispatch a naval task force across the Atlantic, and 10

weeks of fighting followed before Argentina's surrender on June 14, restoring British administration.

Nothing in the anthem mentions England by name. It hardly needs to. Football and geopolitics have always shared an uneasy border when these two sides meet, and history has supplied more than its share of flash-points — Antonio Rattin's sending-off in 1966, Diego Maradona's Hand of God in 1986, David Beckham's red card in 1998, David Beckham's disputed penalty in 2002. Allegation has always followed counter-allegation.

It was Maradona himself who first fused the football rivalry with the memory of

war, invoking Argentina's fallen soldiers in the dressing room before the 1986 quarter-final in Mexico City. Argentina won the match 2-1, and that tournament, and Maradona later admitted his first goal against England — the infamous Hand of God — had been deliberate, a private act of revenge for 1982. It made him immortal in Argentina and reviled in England in equal measure.

Little wonder, then, that Argentina's fans — arguably world football's most fervent travelling army — have turned *The Fourth Star* into folklore before the semi-final has even arrived.

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Diego Maradona scores the 'Hand of God' goal against England in the 1986 World Cup quarter-final. He later said the controversial act was a private revenge for the Falkland War four years ago. (Getty Images)

Song that peps up fans with a punch & a pinch

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Written by Pablo Quintana, who performs as Palmito Música, the song is deliberately a coming-of-age piece rather than a taunt. "I tried to evoke the Argentine popular feeling, that of the fans, the families, and the kids," Quintana told the newspaper *La Nación*. "They're the biggest crowd, the ones who sing louder."

It marks a clear break from what came before. The 2014 anthem, *Brasil, decime que se siente*, was pure needle — a gloating reminder of Argentina's 1990 World Cup 1-0 win over Brazil in the Round of 16, closing with the line that Maradona was greater than Pelé. It was, after all, Maradona who provided the magical assist to Claudio Caniggia for the winning strike. *Muchachos*, the 2022 anthem, was built on hope rather than mockery, and it became a global phenomenon, sung as fervently in



Newark's fan zones as in the stands of Qatar. *The Fourth Star* has taken longer to catch fire, only truly spreading after the win over Egypt.

That evolution says something about where Argentina finds itself. This is a fanbase that spent decades starved of success and has now tasted the Copa América in 2021 and the World Cup in 2022. *The Fourth Star* doesn't plead for glory the way *Muchachos* once did — it demands a second star in as many tournaments, urging Lionel Scaloni's side toward a feat only

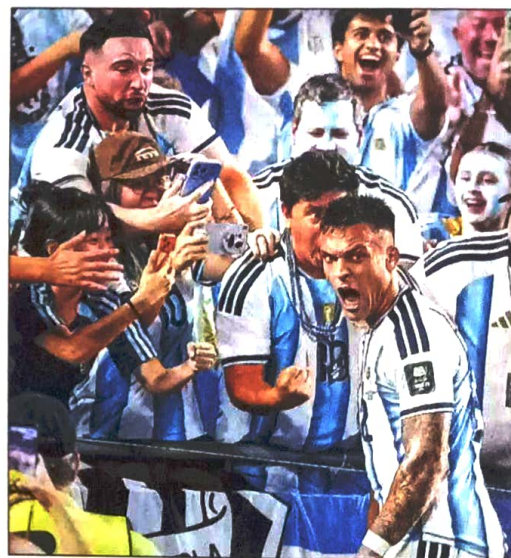
Brazil (1958, 1962) and Italy (1934, 1938) have managed: defending the World Cup.

On Wednesday, the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta will turn white and blue, and *The Fourth Star* will ring out long before kick-off — a reminder that for Argentina, this rivalry was never only about football.

The anthem's timing, too, is not incidental. Argentina's President Javier Milei — a self-declared admirer of, all people, Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister who sent the task force to reclaim the islands in 1982 — has spent the past several months sharply escalating Argentina's rhetoric on Malvinas, a marked departure from the more conciliatory line he took earlier in his term. In April, marking the war's 44th anniversary, Milei reaffirmed Argentina's sovereignty claim over the islands and warned of "all necessary diplomatic measures" against British oil exploration

in the North Falklands Basin. By late April, he was posting on social media that "the Malvinas were, are, and always will be Argentine."

The shift has coincided with a very Trumpian turn in the geopolitics around it. Milei, often called Trump's "favourite president" and a fixture at conservative gatherings in the US, has watched Washington's relationship with London sour over Europe's reluctance to back the US-Israel conflict with Iran — friction serious enough that a leaked Pentagon memo reportedly floated reviewing US support for Britain's "imperial possessions," the Falklands among them. For a leader who once mocked politicians who "beat their chests" over Malvinas without results, and who as recently as 2024 suggested islanders might one day "vote" to join Argentina — only to be reminded that they already voted, overwhelmingly, to remain British in 2013 — Milei's sudden hard line has been read by critics at home as opportunism: a nationalist flourish timed to a slump in his domestic popularity, dressed in the same combative, griev-



Argentina's Lautaro Martinez celebrates a goal with fans. (Picture sourced from X)

ance-driven, alliance-testing style that has become Trump's signature on the world stage.

Whether any of that changes anything on the ground is doubtful — analysts note Britain remains a core American ally and Washington is unlikely to force Lon-

don's hand. But the noise around Malvinas, coinciding with Argentina's push for the World Cup itself, has given *The Fourth Star*'s one loaded line an unmistakable political undertow, however much Quintana insists his song was written for the fans, not the generals or the President.