

Xi visits Africa as China seeks to deepen economic relations

Chinese President Xi Jinping was in Africa on Saturday on a four-nation visit seeking deeper military and economic ties while his rival in a bitter trade war, the Donald Trump administration, shows little interest in the world's second most populous continent.

This is Mr. Xi's first trip abroad since he was appointed to a second term in March with term limits removed.

Base in Djibouti

China is already Africa's largest trading partner, and it opened its first military base on the continent last year in the Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti, which this month launched a China-backed free trade zone it calls the largest in Africa. After surpassing the U.S. in arms sales to Africa in recent years, China this month hosted dozens of African military officials for the first China-Africa defence forum.

Mr. Xi is stopping in Senegal and then Rwanda ahead of his participation in a summit of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) grouping, in South Africa, which starts on Wednesday.

Mr. Xi's Africa visit is to highlight China's sweeping "Belt and Road" initiative that envisages linking Beijing to Africa, Europe and other parts of Asia via a network of ports, railways, power-plants and economic zones.

While such high-profile projects bring badly needed infrastructure and generate economic growth, U.S. officials and others have warned that African nations are putting themselves into debt to China. Its government, banks and contractors loaned more than \$94 billion to African governments and state-owned companies from 2000 to 2015, according to the China Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins University.

Africa's natural resources are a major draw for China's economy. China's voracious appetite for resources such as timber and ivory, however, has taken its toll on Africa's environment.

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