

Madagascar, China sign deals worth R557m

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Antananarivo - China and Madagascar have signed four deals worth roughly \$78-million (about R557-million) for hotel construction and debt alleviation among other things, Malagasy officials said.

The deals confirmed agreements made at the China-Africa summit in Beijing last November between the Asian powerhouse and the enormous, mineral-rich island.

"The deals cover partial debt cancellation, an agreement on economic and technical cooperation, a preferential loan for the construction of a five-star hotel, and finally a deal for a donation of medicines," said Misa Irodia, director of bilateral cooperation at the ministry of foreign affairs.

The deals were worth a total of nearly \$78-million, he told journalists late on Saturday.

China was also building an international conference centre, and helping with preparations for the Indian Ocean Games which take place in Madagascar next month, he said.

An incipient mining boom on the vast island is set to include nickel, cobalt, bauxite and ilmenite - a source of titanium dioxide - in the coming years. Explorers are also looking for oil, gold, coal, chromium, gemstones, and uranium.