

Zuma to Visit in BRIC Charm Offensive

August 02, 2010

The  Moscow Times

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa — South African President Jacob Zuma will visit Russia this week as part of a push to open new trade and investment routes to the fast-growing BRIC economies to replace traditional markets in Europe.

Zuma will be in Moscow on Thursday and Friday for talks with President Dmitry Medvedev, who made his maiden trip to Africa a year ago, although he did not visit South Africa, easily the continent's biggest economy.

The Russia trip has a formal focus on building ties in sectors such as agriculture, defense and mining, although it will also enable Zuma to get a glimpse of how Moscow oversees an economy set to grow twice as fast as his own this year.

Zuma will then go to China on an official visit toward the end of the month, although final dates are still being drawn up, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

The trips mean that Zuma will have visited all four of the BRIC countries — Brazil, Russia, India and China — in a little over a year after taking office.

"It's very telling," said Martyn Davies of Frontier Advisory, a Johannesburg-based consultancy. "This year Zuma will have been to all four BRIC economies. That is quite something."

With forecast expansion of just 2.3 percent this year, South Africa stacks up even less favorably against China and India — a prime reason "BRICs" is just "BRICs," and not "BRICSA," as many policymakers in Pretoria would wish.

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