

China-assisted wrestling arena welcomed by Senegalese society

By Hu Zexi, Zhang Penghui, Li Zhiwei, Liu Lingling from People's Daily

A China-aided arena for traditional Senegalese wrestling, a gift presented by China to the West African country, is greeted by all locals of the sports-loving country, who believe that as an epitome of bilateral cooperation, the project not only brings tangible benefits to locals, but also adds impetus for local development.

“The National Grand Theater, the Museum of Black Civilization and the National Wrestling Arena, built with Chinese assistance, stand as important venues to carry forward the culture and traditions of Senegal,” Chinese President Xi Jinping wrote in a signed article published on mainstream Senegalese newspaper ahead of his state visit to the African country.

The upcoming delivery of the monumental structure designed by Chinese companies and being built by them is a big event for local residents, since wrestling is a national sport that has conquered the heart of all Senegalese.

As an immensely popular sport in Senegal, wrestling also means “remain true to original aspiration, and strive for glory” in local language.

The modern structure, sitting on 7 hectares of land with 18,000 square meters of floor area, is soon to be delivered after two-year-long construction.

Senegalese government acknowledged the construction of the project in the exchange notes it inked with Chinese government in February 2014, and then signed construction contract with Hunan Construction Engineering Group in December 2015.

Comparing the structure as “a precious gemstone in Dakar, capital and largest city of Senegal”, the mainstream Senegalese newspaper *Le Soleil* said it will “shine on the whole West Africa”. A promotion video was also made by Senegalese national television days ago to arouse local citizens' aspirations for the “strong men” fight.

As a window to present the traditional culture of Senegal, a wrestling game sometimes lasts for hours since it contains not only athletic matches, but also other parts like folk performances, songs and dances.

The wrestling industry in Senegal has witnessed a rapid rise over the past 20 years. In Dakar alone, over 60,000 young men are receiving training on this “cool” sport, with local beaches filled with wrestling-lovers who are making squat, stretching, shuttle run and other exercises.

“Senegal is opening its door wider to the outside world, but it is important for us to never forget our original aspiration,” Alioune Sarr, president of the Senegalese Wrestling Federation, stressed the importance of inheriting this traditional culture.

Such special affection has been taken into consideration by Chinese constructors when designing the structure. Their inspiration for the Big-Gold-Belt-shaped canopy, for instance, came from the belt the wrestlers wear.

The entrance door is set in the east side of the structure out of consideration that a parade will often be held before the game formally starts.

The fine sand have been sieved for twice before they filled the wrestling pool, in order to get rid of any impurity, said Xue Lichun, a project manager.

“The National Wrestling Arena is a representative of Senegal-China friendship,” Matar Ba, Senegal's sports minister told the People's Daily, adding that “we have to extend our gratitude to our Chinese friends”.

Senegalese wrestling star Rattle is excited at the news of Xi's visit, saying that it is an honor of his country. “We are very eager to perform Senegalese wrestling for distinguished Chinese guests and display Senegal's unique cultures to them,” he added.

The on-time delivery of the arena not comes easily as the poor geological conditions of swamp, large construction area as well as the huge span of steel structure all add difficulties to the construction work.

The constructors, by adopting a building information modeling, calculate materials accurately, make deployment precisely, and ensure seamless coordination of every link.

The Chinese contractors applied the strictest standard in the aiding project, and independent inspectors and supervising companies were employed to make regular examination on the project, Han Xiaofei, Economic and Commercial Counselor of Chinese Embassy in Senegal, told the People's Daily.

The wrestling arena, as a model of bilateral cooperation projects, will not only help carry forward Senegal's traditional culture, but also inject impetus for local development, said Senegalese President Macky Sall.

It is estimated that the project has created 3,000-plus jobs for the West Africa country, and Chinese engineers and technicians have trained over 1,000 green-hands of woodworkers, painters, electric welders and other skilled workers.

“Wrestling is a treasure of our country. The projects built with Chinese assistance, including the National Grand Theater as well as the sports park in Dakar, have brought tangible benefits to local people,” said Samba, who has been working on the project for one and a half years.

Studying in Beijing Jiaotong University from 1985 to 1991, Samba is fluent in Chinese. The friendly exchanges between Senegal and China are biggest good news for the two peoples, he added.

Pics:



Chinese and Senegalese national flags fly on the National Wrestling Arena, built with Chinese assistance, to greet Chinese President Xi Jinping's arrival. (By Li Zhiwei from People's Daily)



The wells constructed by Chinese companies for Senegalese villages bring joy to local children. (By Lv Qiang from People's Daily)



Photo shows the National Wrestling Arena built with Chinese assistance. (File photo)