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French Defence Minister arrives for talks

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - French Defence Minister Michele Alliot-Marie arrives tomorrow for talks on bilateral relations and the terrorism threat in the region.

She will call on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at Putrajaya soon after her arrival.

She will also hold discussions with Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

Dubbed the Iron Lady of France, Alliot-Marie's visit is her first to the country since her appointment to the French Government.

She will also be the highest ranking member of the French Government to visit Malaysia to date.

Other matters expected to be discussed are the sale of French arms and Malaysia's participation in the Group of Eight talks this weekend.

France, the chairman of the Group of Eight, is hosting the summit and Dr Mahathir has been invited in Malaysia's capacity as chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Malaysia has announced that it will purchase medium-sized Scorpene class and Agosta class submarines from France in a deal worth more than RM3 billion.

The Scorpene class submarines, described to be the newest in its range, is scheduled to be delivered by 2010, while the Agosta will be used in training.

The armed forces will also take delivery of six Fennec helicopters worth more than RM170 million for the navy next year.