

Turkey, M'sia seek 'strategic' ties, sign deals
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Turkey and Malaysia said Tuesday they would pursue a "strategic" relationship as they signed several accords, among them a \$600 million (RM1.8 billion) deal for armoured vehicles production.

"We have decided to elevate our relations to a strategic level," said Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, adding that the two countries would seek to finalise an agreement to that effect by the end of the year, coupled with a free trade accord.

Najib, on an official visit to Turkey, addressed a televised press conference along with Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Earlier, Turkish defence industry company FNSS signed a deal with Malaysian partner Deftech to develop and manufacture 257 armoured vehicles for the Malaysian army, Anatolia news agency reported.

The deal, worth about \$600 million, is the largest single export so far in Turkey's fledgling defence industry sector, it said.

Other Turkish firms signed deals with Malaysian partners to modernise Malaysian military aircraft and their electronic warfare systems, the agency said, without elaborating on the financial terms.

Erdogan called for boosting bilateral economic cooperation and mutual investments, stressing that the two countries would aim to increase their trade volume from the current \$1.1 billion to \$5 billion (RM3.3 billion to RM15.2 billion).

Turkey and Malaysia also agreed to introduce a visa-free travel regime for their nationals, he said.

Najib was to travel on to Istanbul on Wednesday to attend a meeting of Turkish and Malaysian business people and address a conference on developments in the Muslim world.

Erdogan's Islamist-rooted government has sought closer ties with the Muslim world, including Iran, leading some to suggest that Turkey, Nato's sole Muslim-majority member, is sliding away from the West.

- AFP