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ABDULLAH FLIES TO PERU ON SPECIAL MISSION

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 25 (Bernama) -- Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi left this morning for Lima, Peru, to intensify efforts to secure the safe and early release of Malaysian ambassador Ahmad Mokhtar Selat who is among more than a hundred people still held captive by rebels there.

A Wisma Putra statement said Abdullah left on a special mission on the instruction of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Arrangements have been made for Datuk Abdullah to call on Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori and other Peruvian ministers to hold discussions on the current hostage crisis and in particular to further intensify the efforts to secure the safe and early release of Ambassador Ahmad Mokhtar.

"The government reiterates its deep concern for the safety and well-being of Ambassador Ahmad Mokhtar as well as its determination to exert its utmost efforts to secure his early release," it said.

Ahmad Mokhtar was among several hundred guests taken hostage by the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement at a reception at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima on Dec 17.

The rebels have released more than 450 of the hostages.

Malaysian Ambassador to Brazil Datuk Zainal Abidin Zain, who is in temporary charge of the embassy in Peru, when contacted in Lima today said there were still 105 hostages held captive. -- BERNAMA

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