

29 DEC 1996

Mokhtar-Release

AHMAD MOKHTAR RELEASED BY PERUVIAN GUERILLAS

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 29 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's ambassador to Peru Ahmad Mokhtar Selat was released at 5pm Peruvian time Saturday (0600 hrs Malaysian time today) by Peruvian guerillas from the Japanese embassy in Lima.

Head of Chancellery at the Malaysian mission, Nazarudin Salleh confirmed that Ahmad Mokhtar was among 20 hostages released by the Tupac Amaru Revolution Movement members who held them captive since Dec 17.

There are now 83 hostages left at the Japanese embassy.

"He walked out of the embassy at 5pm (Dec 28) local time," he told Bernama when contacted by phone from here.

Also released were the Dominican Republic's ambassador, Jose Diaz Baldeparas, and several Peruvian businessmen.

Nazarudin said that Ahmad Mokhtar was in good health. He has returned to the Malaysian embassy.

Nazarudin said that Ahmad Mokhtar was reunited with his family as soon as he was released.

He was also greeted by Japanese diplomats and swarmed by journalists, he added.

Arrangements were being made for Ahmad Mokhtar and his family to return to Malaysia for a rest following the ordeal, he added.

Ahmad Mokhtar was released five hours after Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's departure for home following his meeting with President Alberto Fujimori.

He was sent by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to convey Malaysia's concern over the hostage-taking incident at the embassy.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian government has conveyed sincere thanks and gratitude to the Peruvian government and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in securing the release of Ahmad Mokhtar who was among some 500 hostages held by the heavily armed guerrillas.

Abdullah, in a statement issued here, said the government also thanked all Malaysians, the Malaysian Red Crescent Society and the media for their assistance during the critical time.

"Their support and prayers have been a source of strength to Ahmad Mokhtar and his family during their ordeal," he added.

Abdullah said Malaysia hoped that the crisis would be speedily resolved. -- BERNAMA

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