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Mahathir-Peru

MALAYSIA REGRETS THAT ITS ENVOY IS HELD HOSTAGE IN PERU

By: Zainoor Sulaiman

BANGALORE, Dec 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia regrets that its ambassador in Peru, Ahmad Mokhtar Selat is among those held as hostages by a group of rebels there who are trying to solve their problems with the Peruvian government, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Malaysia should not be involved in the matter as it had never interfered in the internal politics of that nation, he told reporters at the end of his four-day official visit to India.

The Prime Minister said the government was following the developments and hoped the Malaysian ambassador would be freed immediately by the group.

Ahmad Mokhtar is among more than 300 hostages comprising several foreign diplomats and government officials being held at the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima since Tuesday.

The rebels from the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) took the hostages during a reception held by the Japanese Ambassador to commemorate the birthday anniversary of the Japanese Emperor.

Yesterday, the rebels released 30 more hostages. Earlier, they had released more than 100 hostages since the rebels took over the Japanese ambassador's residence.

Peru's President Alberto Fujimori told Marxist rebels holding about 340 hostages in the Japanese ambassador's home on Saturday night that he would not use force against them if they surrendered arms and freed all captives.

The leftist rebels promised gradually to free all hostages not linked to the government.

Dr Mahathir had said on Wednesday that he was sure the Peruvian government would be able to solve the crisis.

Malaysia's ambassador to Brazil, Datuk Zainal Abidin Zain is now in Lima to look after the affairs of the Malaysian Embassy there temporarily. An additional officer from the Malaysian embassy in Santiago had also been sent to the Peruvian capital to strengthen the embassy in Lima.

Meanwhile in KUALA LUMPUR, Zainal Abidin when contacted by Bernama in Lima today, said Ahmad Mokhtar, who is being placed on the ground floor of the Japanese ambassador's residence is safe.

He said this was confirmed by one of the three envoys released yesterday.

The three were Brazillian Ambassador Carlos Luiz Coutinho Perez, Egyptian Ambassador Sami Tewfik and South Korean Ambassador Lee Won-young. They were released together with 35 other hostages as a "channel" for negotiations between the rebels and the Peruvian government yesterday.

"The Peruvian government had also resumed water supply, provided hot meals and toiletries," he added.

Yesterday, the rebels, through the three envoys released, had asked the Fujimori government to resume water and electricity supply and telephone lines to the Japanese ambassador's residence and demanded for a dialogue to resolve the matter.

He said Fujimori had explained the stand of his government which wants the rebels to lay down arms and release the hostages to avoid the use of force by the government.

Fujimori also pledged that discussions with the rebels would be continued to find a solution to their demands even though they had laid down their arms.

In SEBERANG JAYA, PULAU PINANG, Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad

Badawi said Malaysia would continue to be patient and wait (for the latest developments) as the problem was not easy to overcome.

He said although Malaysia had stated its readiness to help Peru in whatever way deemed necessary, there had been no reaction from the Latin American nation regarding Malaysia's offer.

Asked about Fujimori's reaction to Dr Mahathir's letter requesting the former to ensure that the crisis be settled amicably, Abdullah said Fujimori had pledged that his government would make every effort to release all hostages in the best possible way.

Met at the wedding of a TV3 cameraman here, today, Abdullah said it was difficult for Peru to fulfil the demands of the rebels which, among others, seek for the release of their colleagues who are being held in prison.

He said although Ecuador, a neighbour of Peru, had stated its willingness to accept the rebels, he was not certain whether Peru would allow them passage to a third country without any hindrance.

Abdullah also said that the Head of Chancery at the embassy in Peru, Nazaruddin Salleh informed him this morning that the doctor examining Ahmad Mokhtar confirmed that the Malaysian envoy was healthy and looked "in high spirits". -- BERNAMA

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