

26 DEC 1996

Hostages-Peru

MALAYSIAN EMBASSY OFFICIALS IN LIMA INTENSIFY EFFORTS

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 26 (Bernama) -- Malaysian officials in Lima have intensified efforts to secure the safe and early release of Malaysian ambassador Ahmad Mokhtar Selat who is among more than a hundred hostages held by Peruvian rebels.

Malaysian ambassador to Brazil Datuk Zainal Abidin Zain, who is in temporary charge of the embassy in Peru, said he and other embassy officials have been working hard to ensure Ahmad Mokhtar's early release.

"We hope that he will be released as soon as possible," Zainal Abidin told acting Foreign Minister Datuk Abu Hassan Omar during an interview over TV3's "Malaysia Hari Ini" programme today.

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.

Kenji Hirata, the first secretary of the Japanese embassy in Lima, is the latest hostage to be freed by the rebels. His release at 5pm local time (4am Malaysian time today) was due to his poor health.

Zainal Abidin, when contacted in Lima today, said Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who left here yesterday on a special mission on the instruction of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is expected to arrive in Lima at 1.30am local time (2.30pm Malaysian time today).

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

Zainal Abidin said Abdullah is expected to stay in the Peruvian capital for two or three days.

Some 20 officials from the Peruvian Foreign Ministry, including Foreign Minister Francisco Tudela, are among the 104 remaining hostages. -- BERNAMA
ES RV CTL