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Mahathir-Peru

PM: I HAVE CONFIDENCE IN FUJIMORI TO SETTLE HOSTAGE CRISIS

LANGKAWI, Dec 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today President Alberto Fujimori had telephoned him a few days ago to express his concern that Malaysian Ambassador to Peru, Ahmad Mokhtar Selat was still being held hostage in the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima.

The Prime Minister said Fujimori in his telephone conversation had informed the former about development regarding the hostage crisis.

Ahmad Mokhtar is among 104 hostages still being held by the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) guerrillas at the Japanese Ambassador's residence in the Peruvian capital. Hundreds of other hostages, including diplomats from Europe, had been released in stages since the December 17 incident.

Dr Mahathir reiterated his stand that he had full confidence in President Fujimori in settling the crisis.

"I don't want to push President Fujimori in his efforts to end the crisis immediately for fear that any rash move might endanger the lives of the hostages," he told reporters at the Langkawi International Airport here before leaving for Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir said it was not easy to settle problems like the one faced by President Fujimori now.

"We know that he (Fujimori) is now under pressure...if he gives in (to the demands of the MRTA) the problem may be repeated or it can occur in the neighbouring countries," he added.

But if he did not give in, Dr Mahathir said, innocent people might become victims.

"It is no easy matter, if I'm in his position, I may feel pressured and even now I am feeling the pressure because I'm concerned about the safety of our ambassador and officials there," he said.

Dr Mahathir stressed that Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi is now in Peru to meet President Fujimori and try to secure Ahmad Mokhtar's freedom.

-- BERNAMA

MT+MFJ AO