

18 DEC 1996

Mahathir-Fujimori

PM SENDS LETTER TO FUJIMORI OVER HOSTAGE INCIDENT

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today sent a letter to Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori requesting his intervention for the safe release of at least 200 hostages, who include the Malaysian ambassador, held by heavily armed guerrillas in Lima.

"I have learnt with sadness, alarm and grave concern of the recent incident in Lima. In view of the gravity of the situation, I wished to request you, Mr President, to personally intervene in order to secure the safe release of all the hostages.

"I hope you will take appropriate measures and ensure no loss of life," he said in the letter read by Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi at a news conference at Wisma Putra here.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir had told reporters at another function that the government was concerned over the incident but he believed the Peruvian government would do their best in handling the problem.

The hostages are still being held at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, the Peruvian capital.

Abdullah said Malaysia supported whatever action taken by the Peruvian government to ensure the safety of all the hostages, including Malaysian ambassador Datuk Ahmad Mokhtar Selat.

He said the government was making contacts with the Peruvian and Japanese embassies here for the latest information while monitoring the the situation in Lima.

Abdullah said Ahmad Mokhtar, 48, and the other hostages were seized by a group of 30 armed guerrillas from the Cuban-inspired Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement.

According to news agency reports, the guerrillas have threatened to kill the hostages unless the Peruvian government freed imprisoned fellow rebels.

Abdullah said the hostages were seized at 9.05pm local time on Tuesday (10.05am Malaysian time today) while attending a reception to honour the Japanese Emperor's birthday.

Among the hostages are Peruvian Foreign Minister Dr Francisco Tudela, several foreign envoys and Peruvian politicians.

All women, the elderly and leftist members of parliament, totalling about 200 people, have been freed. -- BERNAMA

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