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Ambassador-Situation

REBELS USE HOSTAGES TO PRESSURE FUJIMORI GOVT

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 19 (Bernama) -- Peruvian guerrillas have told foreign envoys held hostage in Lima to ask their governments to pressure President Alberto Fujimori to start negotiations, according to captive Malaysian Ambassador Ahmad Mokhtar Selat.

Ahmad Mokhtar, who is among about 200 people still held in the Japanese ambassador's residence, conveyed the guerrillas' demand in a message to Wisma Putra.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Ahmad Mokhtar telephoned the message to the first secretary of Malaysia's embassy in Peru, Nazarudin Salleh, at 12.12pm local time (2.12am Malaysian time).

Nazarudin then forwarded the message to Wisma Putra early today, he told reporters at a briefing on the hostage situation.

He said Ahmad Mokhtar's message also said the Fujimori government had so far refused to issue any statement on the demands of the guerrillas who belonged to the leftist Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement.

The message said the guerrillas wanted the Peruvian government to free their jailed comrades from the movement in exchange for the safe release of the hostages.

The guerrillas seized the Japanese ambassador's residence yesterday and took hostage several hundreds people attending a reception to honour the Japanese emperor's birthday.

About 80 women and old people were later released.

Abdullah said the guerrillas also demanded that the Peruvian security forces ease the pressure on them.

They said that as a result of the pressure from the Peruvian police, two of the guerrillas were injured and they had asked for medical aid from the Red Cross.

Abdullah said Ahmad Mokhtar also said in his message that he was in good health and all the hostages were treated well.

On Malaysia's response to the guerrillas' demands, he said the letter sent yesterday by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Fujimori was clear and sufficient.

Dr Mahathir's letter had expressed concern for the safety of the hostages and asked Fujimori to take the appropriate measures to ensure their release and ensure no loss of life.

Abdullah said the Malaysian government would continue to monitor the situation.

Besides the Malaysian ambassador, a Reuter report said the ambassadors of Austria, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Cuba, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Japan, Panama, Poland, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Venezuela and the European Community were among about 250 still being held. --

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