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LEAD Mahathir-Peru

SAFETY OF AMBASSADOR TOP PRIORITY, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 22 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will agree to any solution by the Peruvian government that will ensure the safety of its ambassador who is among the more than 300 hostages being held at the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that Peru's President Alberto Fujimori's statement today that he would not use force against the rebels if they surrendered their arms and freed all captives "may be one way to solve the crisis."

"We can't give too much advice. Then there will be confusion. We leave it to the Peruvian government to solve the problem," he told reporters on his return from an official visit to India at the Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport, here tonight.

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.

Speaking in Bangalore, India, earlier today, Dr Mahathir expressed regret that the Malaysian Ambassador in Peru was among those held as hostages by a group of rebels there who are trying to solve their problems with the Peruvian government.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia should not be involved in the matter as it had never interfered in the internal politics of that nation. --

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