

02/01/1997

Security at embassies abroad to be beefed up

Kamarul Yunus

THE Government will take steps to improve security at Malaysian embassies abroad following the Lima hostage crisis, in which Ambassador to Peru Ahmad Mokhtar Selat was detained for 11 days.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the need to improve security will naturally be greater in "high-risk" areas. The Government, however, is not expected to stop sending envoys to such countries.

"The procedures will remain the same. We will continue to foster relations with Latin America," he told reporters after accompanying Mokhtar, who arrived at the Sultan Abdul Aziz International Airport in Subang, four days after his release by the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement.

The hostage crisis at the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima enters its third week, with 81 hostages still held captive by the rebels, who are demanding the release of some 400 comrades from Peruvian prison.

Mokhtar was held hostage with over 400 ambassadors, government officials and guests of the Japanese Ambassador on December 17. They were attending a reception held to celebrate the Japanese Emperor's birthday.

Abdullah said he will submit a report to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Mokhtar's release and experience during the crisis.

The minister had gone to Peru on December 26 on a mission ordered by Dr Mahathir to secure the early and safe release of Mokhtar. The Ambassador was released on December 28.

Abdullah said Mokhtar's release can be attributed to the close cooperation between the governments of Peru and Malaysia.

"That is why we always want to have close cooperation with other countries. In times like this (hostage crisis), relationship is important, not only economic and political cooperation but also on other matters."

Abdullah said Mokhtar will meet and brief the Prime Minister, adding that he will also need to discuss with Mokhtar his experience.

"We hope to learn from the incident so that we could take the necessary measures to beef up security at our embassies overseas."

Asked whether new procedures or guidelines would be introduced in sending Malaysian ambassadors overseas, especially to countries in Latin America, Abdullah said there are no immediate plans for it.

To a question whether the Government will employ private security officers to protect the ambassadors, he said there was also no need for that.

(END)