

Burma holds Japanese newsmen

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by Chuchart Kangwan and Alan Boyd

THE Japanese Government is conducting secret negotiations to free two television cameramen who were arrested while trying to enter Burma illegally to record the unrest in Rangoon.

Karen rebels and Japanese officials named the two last night as Naoki Mabuchi, 44, and Shosuke Takeuchi. Both are Japanese nationals.

The two cameramen were in Burma as freelancers, but were believed to be working under an arrangement with Asahi Television of Tokyo.

A Japanese Embassy spokesman said the cam-

eramen were held in the town of Pa-An, 80 km inside Burmese territory, probably on September 17.

Guerrilla leaders at the nearby Karen headquarters of Maw Po Kay in southeastern Burma told the *Bangkok Post* they were approached by Mabuchi and Takeuchi on September 11 to guide the two men to Rangoon.

"We refused because the risk was too high, so they hired an independent guide," one Karen

leader said.

"We heard they were arrested in Pa-An and are now being held in Moulmein."

The embassy spokesman said they were both unharmed and were being treated fairly well by their captors. No charges had yet been laid by Burma.

"We have been in touch with the Burmese Government, but the embassy has not yet decided how to approach the problem," she said.

The detentions are likely to prove an embarrassment for Japan, which is Burma's biggest aid donor and enjoys good relations with the government in Rangoon.

Complicating the problem is the fact that Mabuchi, a world-acclaimed cameraman, is known to have filmed extensively in rebel-held areas and three years ago was expelled from Thailand for recording a controversial interview with opium warlord Khun Sa.

He was formerly based in Bangkok with the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and is

known for his daring film work.

His companion, Takeuchi, is a freelance photographer who had extensively covered events in Laos before and after the Communist takeover.

● Meanwhile, Japan expressed concern yesterday about political developments in Burma and said it would wait to decide whether it would recognise that nation's new military government.

"Japan has very strong concern about the unstable political situation in Burma," Foreign Ministry spokesman Yoshifumi Matsuda told reporters at a regular news-briefing. "We are ready to cooperate in any manner in re-establishing stability to the Burmese situation."

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