

# Hundreds trapped as armed Myanmar rebels seize hospital in Thailand

RATCHABURI, Thailand (AP)—Little was known about the gunmen or the situation inside the hospital until they let in a television crew from Thai Channel 7.

They took footage showing scores of frightened people sitting on rows of waiting-room benches and of a masked man brandishing an assault rifle.

"We want to tell the world how Karen and Burmese refugees live during the fighting," one hostage-taker, who

called himself Nui, said. "We will not hurt any hostages. We take good care of them."

A doctor telephoned about two dozen patients and their relatives in the post-operative ward, telling them not to move.

Lacking contact with hospital officials, the patients did what the rest of Thailand did — watch the drama unfold on television.

Prasert Panpongpaew, 63, a retired government official with diabetes, said that at mid-day, the patients reasoned that the raiders

weren't covering all the buildings and they would try to escape.

"I wasn't scared, but some people were," Prasert said.

"We had to take some risk. Fifty-fifty.

We helped each other get up, and we got down the stairs OK and outside."

Boonmak Sirinavakul, a local member of parliament, said doctors outside were using mobile phones to instruct nurses inside on caring for patients.

The government of Myanmar expressed hope the siege would end without bloodshed, and said the hospital takers should be treated as terrorists by the international community.

Last Oct. 1, five members of a small dissident group, the Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors, seized Myanmar's embassy in Bangkok and held dozens of hostages for 20 days before being flown to the border and freed.

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