

OA 11888 / A.R. / 100004

BP 31/9/1986

Signs of sinking morale in Burmese military,

ONLY small anti-government demonstrations were held in Rangoon yesterday, but diplomats said there were signs of sinking morale in the military as the protests continue and supplies of rice for soldiers dwindled.

"Military morale has been falling as every day the government shows itself unable to respond to the challenge," said one Western diplomat contacted by telephone from

Bangkok.

Analysts said the military was particularly concerned about the government's ability to collect rice from the Irrawaddy river delta area where harvesting is set to begin shortly.

Like many areas of Burma the rice-rich delta area is out of government control, with most towns run by committees made up of monks, students and civil servants sympathetic to the anti-government protesters.

The army itself is believed running short of rations due to months of unrest, a rail strike and long-standing low government rice procurement prices.

"At the front line there are reports of soldiers with only a tin rice gruel to eat," one analyst said.

The diplomat said military commanders met on Friday to discuss the situation. He denied, however, a report that

10 battalions of army troops and air force unit at Hmawbi, 40 miles north of Rangoon, had gone over to the demonstrators.

"We have reports that some military people have joined the demonstrators in that area, but it does not appear correct to say that whole units and their commanders have done so," he said.

An analyst in Bangkok said the army unit at Hmawbi is the best