Kilali: what some observers can't see. (1993, November 07) The *Sunday times.*

Kilali: what some observers can't see

An elderly civilian in Jaffna learns to use a rifle

By The Sunday Times Defence Correspondent

As the night enveloped the waters off the hamlet of Kilali last Monday the drone of outboard motors rose above the sound of dull winds.

The boat service operated by the LTTE, in open defiance of a "no go zone" declared by the security forces, was in full swing. Then suddenly SLAF aircraft began to intercept them. Both the Sri Lanka Army and the Navy also joined in with counter measures.

This fresh offensive beginning November 1 was the main military operation in the area after the controversial seven-day long "Operation Yal Devi". Its aim was to restrict, if not prevent altogether, boat movements from Kilali to Sinna Paranthan.

The move to exert fresh military pressure on LTTE boat movements in Kilali was decided upon by the security forces top brass.

The Sunday Times of October 31, in these columns, reported that a responsible section of the defence establishment, being concerned of the continuing availability of the Kilali facility to the LTTE, is contemplating other options. The report said the matter has received their careful consideration in the past several days.

This became clear after it was widely known that despite "Operation Yal Devi," whose declared objective was "to destroy boat landing points and allied facilities used by the LTTE in area Kilali", Tiger boat services had resumed no sooner the military offensive ended.

Just last week, a Tamil gentleman, once a soldier in the Sri Lanka Army and now a farmer in Point Pedro, arrived in Colombo through the hazardous Kilali route. Sergeant Gnanapandither who served in the Sri Lanka Artillery met some of his retired colleagues in Colombo and related how the LTTE boat service was functioning again after "Operation Yal Devi" ended. That was not all.

Gnanapandithar also said the LTTE had launched a recruitment drive (after "Operation Yal Devi") but he refused to get involved in any detailed discussion for obvious reasons.

His disclosures came fiard on the heels of other reports including one in the Observer of October 21 that the boat service was functioning. This report said: The LTTE boat service in Kilali is in full swing and many Jaffna civilians are using this service despite the danger of getting caught in the crossfire..." That is the truth.

Whatever the questions that remain unanswered, there is one issue on which there is no challenge. That is the courage and gallantry of our security forces. They sure had not only grit and guts but a deep sense of honest, loyal commitment to their motherland.

There are, however, elements who would prefer to keep the political hierarchy guiding the destinies of this country in the dark as to the true events that are unfolding in the war front. This itself is a dangerous trend since in the ultimate analysis it is the politicians who will have to bear the brunt of the blame that takes place due to decisions based on wrong information.

In my report in The Sunday Times of October 10, I said "... had the Army sustained itself in Kilali and held on to the territorial gains made, the military loss of face to the LTTE would have been more credible if not devastating, It would certainly have lowered its esteem in the eyes of the populace and in turn had an impact on its drive to recruit more terrorists.

"Even more the discredit brought to the LTTE by a hard military blow would have military infallibility in the eyes of the populace and supporters. For after all the following to any military movement is largely due to the belief of an assurance of victory - no one is going to support a losing cause."

The opposite of this appears to be taking place now in the Jaffna peninsula with the LTTE playing on what it claims to be its success at Kilali and using that together with the inability of security forces to retain (what they call) Kilali to boost up what they pronounce to be their strength. However incorrect their claims are, that propaganda has been levered to a recruiting campaign. Building up an invasion hysteria to gain public sympathy which was on the wane, they are said to be drawing in a fair number as recruits - something it could not do earlier.

In the past two weeks, the LTTE has interrupted upper classes in school's to screen video footage of its own tailored account of the battle during 'Operation Yal Devi'. Some parents had tried to beat the recruitment drive by asking their children to remain at home but Tigers have begun a house-to-house campaign too.

In a message to the Jaffna public, broadcast by the so-called Voice of Eelam, the LTTE said: "Our people should not be worried about the negotiations or peace attempts. The Government has clearly signalled that there will not be negotiations or peace attempts... we appeal to all the youth, both male and female, to join our armed struggle. This is an urgent appeal..."

Another new move by the LTTE has been the drafting of elderly civilians to a Home Guard and thus relieve active cadres from logistical duties. Elderly civilians have been given basic weapons training as pictures on these pages show.

As one analyst of ongoing developments in the separatist war remarked, correspondents, defence or otherwise, must report on the facts. "Strategy should be left in the hands of experts who we expect will not fail the country," he added.