

Urbanisation: A Problem of Development

All cities are human-created. They evolved with the evolution of human civilisation — when man learned to live a settled life — which is identified with the invention of agriculture. The evolution of cities are essentially related to the fertility of soil. Cities sprang up on the bank of the rivers — great and small. Mesopotamia was built on the bank of the river Euphrates. On our soil, Dhaka sprang up on the bank of river Buriganga. Chittagong, the port city, sprang up on the bank of river Karnafuli. Mongla town, a river port, sprang up on the bank of the river Pashur. So, we see that, besides fertility of soil, another great factor that came into consideration for creating cities is communication facility to establish national and overseas trade networks. Before the Industrial Revolution or industrial civilisation, the rivers (and seas) were the most effective infrastructure of communication.

past nor in today's industrial world, it is not only the elites who live in cities. It is a dreamland for the most prosperous people as well as for the poor. Its pull is much greater than its push. It allure all. It is the crystallisation of civilisations of all ages.

The city population, why a conglomeration? As already pointed, the city allure all. But why? The prosperous rush to the city to enjoy the amenities of civilisation. The poor come to the city to eke out a living. The pathos of life is that the prosperous cannot enjoy the amenities of life without the help of the poor. So we hear a housewife even in a middle-class family of Dhaka requesting a woman from a village: "Please, bring us a girl from your village to work as a maid in our house. It will be better if she is not a grown-up". Yes, the city-dwellers must have cooks to prepare food in houses and restaurants, sweepers to clean the city streets and sewerage, drivers to drive motor vehicles, mechanics to repair the same and, above all, labourers to work in factories, to break bricks and stones to construct city roads and houses. And then, there are many other activities which the ordinary people are engaged in not only to earn their own living but also to meet the demand of other people in the city.

So long people come to city and find employment, there is no problem, but they become problem when they do not find employment. This creates pockets of poverty in the cities which were created by kings, conquerors and the prosperous people. The problem is further aggravated when people do not get the due wages for their labour. In extreme cases of such situations, many people

in cities may not have houses to live in, enough food to eat, pure water to drink, medication against ailment, to point out some of the major problems. Such problems will create slums and squatters like we have in Dhaka.

Dhaka slums: Dhaka slums and squatters should by themselves not be a cause of concern to the elites and prosperous people because these are to be found even in the cities of the developed countries. Dhaka slums are the creation of the economic and geographical conditions of Bangladesh and solution to this must be found in the light of those conditions. In this connection it may be explained why the city has a great power to pull people. Or should it be said it has a great attraction for the people. So we see that even in developed countries people

from entering the city. Dhaka would continue to see more and more slums if it did not follow the dictum of development.

Development is essentially an economic one, which means producing more and more goods and services in a manner which would bring both personal and social benefits. Production of more and more goods and services would bring economic development but if it does not benefit people both individually and socially economic development may not take place as fast as desirable. This is a very difficult task to balance the individual and social benefit, particularly at the beginning of economic development. Without properly knowing the problem, it would not be too wise to become to be too rigid about balancing the individual

by M Wahiduzzaman

leave the vast countryside where they can work and can practically get all the amenities of modern life. Dhaka's pull is many times stronger for many reasons.

Bangladesh does not have any vast countryside. It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Increasingly people here are getting landless with the growth of population, erosion of rivers and other natural calamities. These landless people, finding no means of earning their livelihood in the countryside, are coming to cities, particularly to Dhaka and creating slums. And it would be impossible to clear those slums by evicting the dwellers. Nor would it be possible to clear the city slums by making ideal villages for them. And then, it would neither be possible nor desirable to stop such people

and social benefits of economic development. There must be equitable distribution of economic development. But it cannot be hundred per cent equitable.

In Bangladesh society we may not want absolute equality among the people, but the fact is that the absolute majority of the people of Bangladesh are hewers of wood and drawers of water and the rest are just *nouveau riche*. Dhaka, a Bangladesh for that matter, does not have a single business tycoon. Nor have our governments been able to play the roles of business tycoons and produce goods and render services under state support. Bangladesh is a fine example of democracy of poverty. Time has come for us to ask ourselves: do we want to live in an industrial civilization which began with the coming



A slum in the city: A growth obstructing the growth.

of the Industrial Revolution or do we want to keep ourselves tied to the Medieval civilisation? If we opt for the first, we must go for large-scale industrialisation and abandon the practice of keeping our people alive as producers of the middle ages — small farmers, weavers and labourers in small industries. Small is beautiful but not always. A ring on one's finger may be beautiful but it is not the crown on one's head. To have love for the poor and to give them some means to eke out a living is one thing and to give them education, skill, training and the opportunity to take part in large-scale production of goods and services is another thing. The former keeps people tied to the medieval ages while the later makes the people men and women of the industrial

civilisation. **Pragmatic approach to clear the city slums:** As already pointed out, slums are there in cities of all countries. In our context, the rich rush to the city to become richer and to get the best of everything. A large section of the village-people come to the city to receive higher education, another section come to the city to do business. However, the vast majority of the people who come to the city and create slums are the hapless poor — the landless labourers, the people whose lands have sunk into the rivers and those who became homeless by different kinds of natural calamities and personal misfortunes. The dwellers of slums have been evicted time and again. They have been bul-

dozed many times. But once bulldozed off from one place they reappear in another place of the city. It is because slums may be easy to clear by evicting slum-dwellers and ravaging the slums to the ground, but the problem remain so long as the slum-dwellers will continue to remain as slum-dwellers — the hapless people without any fixed jobs to do, to earn a living and to hire houses or rooms of minimum standard to live in. But we shall be doing a wrong — a grave wrong — if we give them just the bare minimum.

The bare minimum maintains the status quo, which is not necessarily development. Development means producing as much more as possible, and as better as possible. Development means maximising the profit of the em-

ployer (the individual/the company/the state) and salaries, wages and other benefits of the employees as much as possible. Development means releasing human energy for production and other creative works. Wherever people are making this kind of development there will be the least chances for the growth of slums.

No concentration of development: The only way to clear slums is to have economic emancipation. And then there is no reason why developmental activities should take place in some limited places.

Development in today's context means industrialisation. And that means urbanisation. But urbanisation must not be concentrated in a few cities.

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Fight to the Finish

Nirupama Subramanian writes from Colombo

The fall of the Tiger's stronghold in the north will certainly be a major psychological boost for Colombo. But as the LTTE strikes in the capital show, the army's victory could be merely symbolic

NOVEMBER 15 is an important month in Jaffna. Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), likes to celebrate November 26 — his birthday — in style and usually begins a week in advance. The town is abuzz with activity as cadres rejoice and microphones blare inspirational music exhorting Tamils forward towards Eelam. But this year, as Prabhakaran turns 41, for the first time in a long while, there will be no celebration in Jaffna.

After 13 years as the capital of a quasi-state, identified everywhere as the headquarters of one of the most ruthless organisations in the world, Jaffna town is empty, the only sounds being those of gunfire, shells and mortar. With the Sri Lankan Army barely kilometres from the outskirts of the town — as claimed by the Government — all the leaders of this notional Eelam, including Prabhakaran, have fled, leaving the rest of the population defenceless and forcing them to flee as well.

Although the fall of Jaffna would mean an important psychological victory for the Sri Lankan Government in the long and bloody history of the country, and give Kumaratunge significant politi-

cal mileage, it by no means heralds the end of the ethnic conflict on the island. "The end of war does not mean peace," Kumaratunge said recently, a statement that could be more prophetic than intended. As if to drive home the point that they can keep up the terror even without Jaffna, the Tigers struck once again in the heart of Colombo. Leaving a heap of mangled bodies near the army headquarters — 11 of them civilians — two suicide bombers of the LTTE effectively demonstrated that they could at will bring the war to the capital.

In this atmosphere of fear and terror, for a majority of Sri Lankans, the only solace seemed to be that the army was drawing close to Jaffna and would almost without doubt wrest it back from the Tigers. For a force that till three months ago seemed unable to get its act together, the forward march deep into Tiger country was an unprecedented reversal of fortune. The army's Operation Riviresa (Sunnays) began on October 17 without the bluster of July's Operation Leap Forward, deviously known as Operation Leap Backward.

Perhaps the most ambitious plan to recapture Jaffna since the IPKF's Operation Pawan, the present offensive involves about 25,000 troops moving southward from Palaly towards Jaffna, taking over an area previously controlled by the Tigers. Backed totally by the Government and equipped with freshly purchased weapons from China, Russia and Israel, the army is moving with a new-found confidence.

A further shot in the arm for the forces came recently with the latest budget wherein the Government declared a massive increase in its defence expenditure: from an estimated US \$24 billion in 1995 to an actual expenditure of US \$32 billion. (The estimate for 1996 has gone up to \$38 billion).

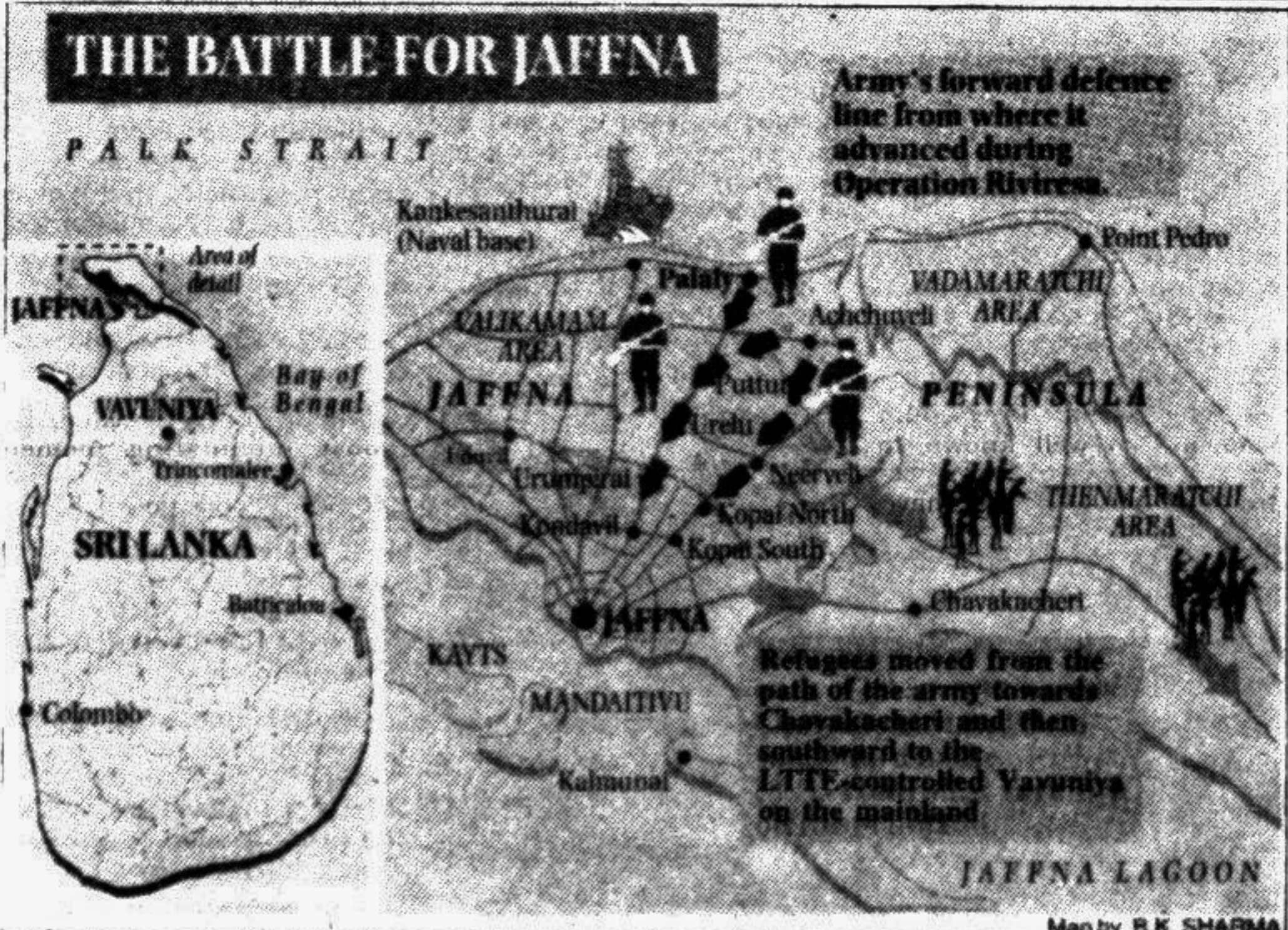
Three weeks after Operation Riviresa began, the Sri Lankan troops had taken control of all but the last 2 km on the road from Point Pedro to Jaffna, moving in a 5-km-wide formation that reached the parallel Palaly-Jaffna road. By November 11, they had established themselves at Kopai North and Urumpirai, advancing southward to Kopai South. But the most important battle was for Neervelli, about 5 km from the city limits of Jaffna town.

After Neervelli, as the world waited impatiently for Jaffna to fall, the army, with perfect military sense, preferred not to play to the

gallery and dug in its heels five tantalising kilometres from Jaffna for nearly eight days. While the onset of the north-east monsoons could have been one reason, the other was the near certainty that the LTTE had extensively booby-trapped and mined the area. Said a military source: "Charging in could have caused immense casualties to the army." However, by the time the offensive resumed on November 10, perhaps the main reason for going slow — the fear of causing a large number of civilian casualties within the high-density town limits — had become a non-issue as the LTTE, in another of its masterstrokes, pushed the residents of Jaffna out of the town towards Thenmaratchi and the mainland. The LTTE move seems dictated by an attempt to sour the symbolic

impact of the army capturing the "Eelam" capital and, more important, to create a massive humanitarian crisis for the Sri Lankan Government. Which it did, as hundreds of thousands of people began moving out of the town towards Chavakacheri and Killinochi even as the army started at the prospect of planting the Lion flag on a ghost town.

Confronted with a snow-balling crisis, the Government instead of acting swiftly to stop it, got into a spar with its agent in Jaffna, K. Ponnambalam, about the number of persons who had been displaced. While Ponnambalam claimed that over four lakh people had arrived at Chavakacheri, the Government said the number was one-fourth of it. Even the population of Jaffna peninsula came under serious dispute, with the agent putting it at eight lakh and the Government estimating it at six lakh. He was finally transferred.



What the army knows only too well is that a Jaffna empty of its population would mean that the LTTE may have lost the battle, but that it is still more than capable of continuing with the war. Capturing ground is only one part of the victory. Holding it is the other, and for this, the army will have to convince those who have fled to come back to Jaffna. The military victory over Jaffna is useless unless the people acquiesce in it," says a former field commander who served in Vavuniya. Expectedly, that task is not going to be easy. Though it is possible that many war-weary Tamils in Jaffna peninsula regard the LTTE as an oppressive force, in their eyes, the Sri Lankan Army is no better. And if the Government attempts to install an administrative set-up in Jaffna after taking it over, it is unlikely to be smooth sailing.

Complicating matters for Kumaratunge is the attitude of the other Tamil parties that supported her devolu-

tion proposals but are not with her in the military action against the LTTE. Though many Tamil leaders privately admit that a convincing military defeat of the LTTE is the only way forward, few are willing to say this aloud. Instead, a joint statement signed, among others, by minister S.Thondaman of the Ceylon Workers Congress, the TULF, the EPRLF and the plot called upon Kumaratunge to halt the war and immediately commence the process for a negotiated political settlement. "Whatever good the political package has done is being negated by the war," said TULF President M. Sivathambaram.

Early last month, before the troops commenced Operation Riviresa, there were indications from the LTTE that it may want to negotiate through a third party. The LTTE's weekly newspaper had hinted that the Tigers might be willing for mediation by "a neutral third party". Soon after, the Jaffna Citizens' Committee, a virtual mouthpiece of the LTTE, wrote to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali

asking him to bring pressure on Kumaratunge for a negotiated "political settlement". But a wiser Kumaratunge, for her part, has ruled out any negotiations unless three conditions are met: cessation of hostilities, laying down of arms and a time frame for a negotiated settlement. With the LTTE not reacting, it is clear that Pirabhakaran is not agreeable to these conditions. Nor is Kumaratunge entertaining any illusions on this front. Her best bet is to carry on with the military offensive, inflict defeats on the LTTE and hope that this will lead to a change in the leadership which would then be more amenable to a political settlement on Kumaratunge's terms. "To be successful, a military defeat of the LTTE has to be accompanied by an elimination of its leadership," says Chanaka Amararatunga of the Liberal Party. Indeed, the Sinhala nationalists-Buddhist monks combine-whose clamour for war against the LTTE has been more than met by Operation Riviresa.

According to Dinesh Gunawardene of the nationalist Mahajana Eksath Perumina, if the army wins the war, it would emerge strong enough to have a say in the country's politics. "They have not sacrificed lives for nothing. Before extreme elements take matters into their own hands, it is better that we should settle the matter through democratic means," he said.

The main opposition party, UNP, whose support Kumaratunge needs to win a two-thirds vote to clear her devolution proposals through Parliament, is quite determined not to allow her a monopoly over the credit for winning the war. But they seem to be unsure how to go about this. With the announcement of the People's Alliance Government's second and highly populist budget, the UNP has found an easier platform from which to fire. "The Government may win the military battle, but what about the economic war? Remember Churchill won the war for England but lost the election," says Susil

Moonesinghe, vice-chairman of the party. However, for as long as the war against the LTTE continues, the opposition to the Government is likely to be muted. No Sinhala party can afford to be seen as opposing a government that is waging a costly war against the Tigers. If anything, they are urging Kumaratunge to look for outside help to inflict a permanent defeat on the LTTE. Said Moonesinghe: "The Sri Lankan Government should launch a joint operation with the Government of India to get hold of Pirabhakaran."

Though many are even convinced that India is already helping the Government, there are no indications that India has made a volte-face from its hands-off Sri Lanka policy of the past five years. For Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, the next general elections are top priority, and his best option would be to remain non-committal. Fortunately for him, Tamil Nadu politics is no longer decided by Sri Lankan Tamils.

Meanwhile, unless drastic developments take place within the LTTE, it looks like the war between the Sri Lankan troops and the Tigers will be another long-drawn-out affair even after the fall of Jaffna. It is estimated that despite the losses suffered by the LTTE in the present operation, it still has anywhere between 8,000 and 10,000 cadres, a large enough force to keep the country in a state of political limbo indefinitely. Even if the army advances beyond Jaffna and attempts to achieve its objective of "liberating" the entire peninsula and parts of the mainland from the LTTE, the Tigers are expected to do what they know best — retreat into the jungles and launch guerrilla strikes. Only this time, the army seems as determined to defeat the LTTE and as prepared to lay down lives. If this is really a "fight to the finish", as the military spokesperson claimed, Pirabhakaran's time may be running out.



TOM and JERRY



Army men at a Tamil rebels' office in Neervelli.