



## Y00



tic fight. In many cases, victims try to cheat by getting two houses or sometimes non-refugees try to get a house. We are firm with such people and hence the blame. There was no demolition drive."

But things are no better in the permanent houses given to the tsunami victims. Saveriyar Nagar is a perfect example. The colony has no roads and on rainy days, the residents have to wade through a gooey mess. Many houses do not have electricity and water connection. What they have are fissures and leaks. The Madras High Court, on safety grounds, ordered the demolition of houses built by the Salvation Army. Upholding the order, the Supreme Court said on March 5 that bricks could easily be pulled out of the unplastered walls.

**Another example is** Surya Nagar, where 60 worst affected families were settled in 2005. Says Moorthy, a resident, "We still do not have septic tanks and it is very difficult for our women." In most houses, the railings of staircases are shaky. Moorthy scratches the plastering on the roof, and sand gushes out. He shrugs helplessly, "That is what the terrace is made of—sand." Anjammal

displays the brick chunks collected in a mug. Says she, "They fell off the wall when I was sweeping the house." Says Kalyani, another resident: "We dread the day the roofs would collapse. Those of us who survived the tsunami face death every day."

Says Mahadevi, 15: "We lived in better houses before the tsunami. We lost our parents and now my elder brother fishes while I take care of the house and my sisters. Sometimes I stay up to ensure that my sisters are not hurt if the roof collapses."

Post-tsunami, the Nagapattinam district administration allotted 304 hectares of land to around 45 NGOs for the construction of 19,986 houses. Of these, 15,270 have been constructed and handed over to beneficiaries.

**The Madras High Court, on safety grounds, ordered the demolition of houses built by the Salvation Army.**

**Sans roof and refuge:** Temporary shelters being demolished in Kadambodi

The NGOs have been asked to construct the remaining houses before September 2008.

Jesu Rathinam, director of Sneha, a Nagapattinam-based NGO, blames the district administration for the poor construction of houses. Says he: "In most cases, the land provided by the government was low-lying, with the threat of permanent water logging. Several NGOs had no local connection and they left Nagapattinam after leaving the construction to contractors. The district administration failed to monitor the construction. Increase in construction costs and non-availability of labour also factored."

Jawahar, however, says that the government has a mechanism to monitor the construction. Says he: "We have a shelter advisory group consisting of government members and members of other organisations, too. We have an expert from the IIT on the team. This group is monitoring the construction of houses and advising the NGOs at every level. Better houses are coming up and we will correct existing problems. There is no dearth of funds and the government would see to it that all basic amenities are provided."

The relocation will cost many victims dearly. One of the small shrines dedicated to tsunami victims at Aaryanaatu Theru was built by Maasilamani and Punitha. The tsunami killed the couple's children—Sanjay, 5, and Sivaranjani, 3. The children loved to play with little wooden boats crafted by their father. A grieving Maasilamani made a larger boat for the shrine. Says Punitha: "Everything reminds us of the children. We planted so many trees after they died, which also remind us of them. How can we ever leave this place?" But bureaucracy perhaps has no room for such emotions. The road to the harbour, which the government plans to expand, would run right through their house and the shrine. •