



Children partaking food at a centre for IDPs.

One, two, three ... they came. They came in tens, hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands. The young and the old, the sick and the healthy, the able and the not so able, all came. At first they were hesitant for their so-called liberators had brain-washed them to believe that on the other side were barbarians ready to pounce upon them, to rape their women, to abuse their children. When hundreds,



While the baby's curiosity has been aroused the mother contemplates what awaits them in their new land of freedom.

## AN UNFOLDING HUMAN SAGA

thousands reached the other side and were safe and sound and even well looked after, the word spread. The numbers began to swell, the pace quickened. They braved all odds, waded through brackish waters not knee deep but even neck deep in certain places and even faced enemy shells and mortars for by this time their erstwhile liberators had turned into their enemies.

At first it was a stealthy trek through jungle and through the sea, sometimes in pitch dark to avoid detention by the "liberators". (If detected the "liberators" would have certainly liberated their "souls.")

With the launch of the humanitarian operation to rescue the civilians held hostage by the LTTE what was once a trek has now developed into a human avalanche. The pictures in this page depict in bold relief the saga of the civilians that have escaped Tiger hell. Their joy, their suffering and their hopes are all written in their faces.

The humane quality of the new but real liberators could also be seen from these visuals. It is a saga worth writing volumes and volumes. For the present we could only give our dear readers only a glimpse of the reality. (JV)



Happy to have regained freedom with their new born baby.



Embarking on a journey to their next destination, a welfare village. Pictures by Rukmal Gamage and Army Media Unit



A baby is born inside a bus. A woman soldier carrying the baby poses for a photograph while the mother rests (top-most picture).