complimentary chocolates from any purchase at the duty free shops along with a sweet note of apology for the 'inconvenience'. My exuberance at seeing my compatriots at the airport terminal was quickly nipped in the bud as I witnessed, to my horror, one of them spitting out his phlegm right out into the other side of the glass railing that divided our terminal from another section. I tried to shut out the image as best as possible and concentrated on the happy thoughts of going home.

As the wheels crunched into the tarmac on homeland, it was hard to quell the growing excitement of being back, the anticipation of seeing loved ones and the relief of resuming normal life. But again, the exhilaration dwindled as we went en route to immigration. The bathroom was wet, with leaking hand showers and faulty door



Suvarnabhumi Airport after being closed for days, goes back to normal.

locks. Several flights had come in at once and the lines at the immigration section were endless. After about forty minutes we were done with immigration but now where on earth was the luggage? People were aimlessly running to and fro, trying to locate their luggage from the sea of suitcases and boxes strewn all over the floors. To my dismay, I found out that all the trolleys had been taken and we would have to wait till a new batch was brought in. The entrance through which the trolleys would be brought in, however, was clogged with frantic male passengers who had no qualms about jostling each other to get a trolley first. I watched in amazement as a young man practically shoved aside an elderly gentleman and shouted at him that he had come first and so he had the right to the trolley. The old man just let go of the trolley and helplessly stared at his attacker. There were airport officials on the other side of the glass door pushing the trolleys in but they did not lift a finger to try and sort out the chaos and make sure that the passengers lined up properly for the trolleys. Instead, they just stood and watched. On this side of the door a woman customs officer languidly said, "Why don't you go in and get the trolley, you will never be able to get it otherwise." I asked her why she could not do something to help which made her go into a tirade saying that she was in customs and so not responsible for such things, that I was out of line and so on.

At last a kind soul took pity on me and handed me his own trolley but the worst was far from over. I tried to hop my way through the obstacle race of strewn luggage to the conveyor belt and managed to retrieve our suitcases. But just as I was passing through the Green Channel after clearance from an official, another customs official stopped me and asked me to get my luggage scanned. When I told him that I needed help with the luggage, he was completely unmoved. After lugging the suitcases on the scanner belt and then shoving them back on the trolley, I was told that I had to get one of my suitcases checked as it had been given a 'cross'. By now I was too angry, frustrated and appalled by the rudeness of my fellow countrymen and told them that I could not lift any more suitcases. This had absolutely no effect and I realised that the only way I could get out of this hell hole was to get the 'cross' cleared.

The checking counter was again flooded by desperate passengers trying to get their luggage cleared. There were many people coming from the Middle East and I watched with disappointment as a customs officer unashamedly confiscated a carton of cigarettes from an old man and made him take out every single item in his boxes, speaking to him in a condescending tone and asking him what new items he had brought. When it came to my turn I was asked if I had anything new, any 'three pieces'. I felt humiliated at having to show all my belongings, especially since the suitcase was full of dirty laundry, thanks to the extra days of waiting. Finally I was cleared and mustering up as much dignity as I could, I walked out of the greeting area.

I had finally come home but it was a homecoming I would most likely never forget. ■