

## WILL BANKS ADOPT CITIZENS' CHARTER?

Do you know that under normal circumstances banks are supposed to take not more than eight minutes to pay cash against your cheque? You should be able to get a demand draft made within 30 minutes, if opening an account should take 30 minutes, you should be able to get your statement of account within 5 days from the due date. Local cheques are to be credited within three days and outstation cheques within 14 days.

Yes, you are not in a foreign country. These are some of the codes of conduct published by our swadeshi banks like SBI, Canara Bank, UCO Bank, Indian Bank etc. though these are not legal obligations, banks have agreed, to display them in the bank premises and stick to these time limits.

In October 97, the State Bank of India had published its code of fair banking practices called 'Towards Excellence' which sets out the code of conduct for the banking staff. It says that customers will be provided with essential information at the time of opening the account, the terms and conditions in plain language, rates of interest, details of charges payable on services offered etc.

If any amount is wrongly debited to your account, the bank will refund the same with interest. It will not close your account without giving you advance notice. You will be surprised to know that the SBI will receive your complaint and acknowledge it on the spot and try to resolve the complaint within a period of three weeks.

According to the code the staff will be conversant with the complaints handling mechanism. When I contacted the local head office of SBI, atleast three officials were not aware of their own charter. Another branch manger wanted time to confirm availability of such a document. And this is after one year after the publication of the charters.

Good Banking is the name of the charter booklet published by Canara Bank. It says that the Bank will provide you the rules of the business and various services offered by way of informative pamphlets. An internal procedure has been established. A number of Customer Service Centers have been set up and a 24 hours Telecontact Service is provided to lodge complaints.

But Canara Bank does not say anything about giving acknowledgement for the complaint or a time limit within which the grievance will be resolved. As per its own cartoon, it is a complaint bell without a gong. A survey conducted by CREAT and CEC has revealed that a majority of the customers and the staff have not seen the booklet.

The UCO Bank has issued its 'commitment to customer' 'effective from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1998. As far as the redressal of the grievances is concerned, the UCO Bank says that the Branch Manager will make all efforts to redress the complaint on the spot or within a fortnight.

The Citizen's Charter issued by the United Bank of India starts with a list of obligations on the part of the bank. This is the only charter among the banks, which says that branch premises will be kept clean and hygienic and seating arrangements will be provided for customers.

The UBI's charter says that it is the obligation of the bank staff to be in their respective seats 15 minutes before the commencement of the banking hours. It has also given the time standards for customer services.

The Citizens' Charter published by Indian Bank is perhaps the biggest running to 62 pages. It contains not only the history and development of the Bank, but also details of all the services provided. For example you can know the eligibility criteria and documents required for obtaining loans under various schemes.

Indian Bank says that if the proceeds of an outstation cheque is not credited within the prescribed limits, it will pay interest at 2 per cent over the Saving Bank rate. The charter gives the list of service charges levied by the bank.

Indian Bank also says that it has a built in grievance redressal mechanism like provision for complaints and suggestion boxes, customer service committees, observance of customer day etc. It says that complaints will be disposed off within 30 days.

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