SBI merger: Customers bank on better online services; expect crowded branches, too

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Mumbai, April 23:
Omprakash Prajapati, an owner of a small enterprise who maintained an account in the erstwhile State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur (SBBJ), had not even heard about the merger of his bank with the State Bank of India until he visited the Mulund branch here last week. But once there, Prajapati said he realised the importance of the move.

"I think it is a good step. Also, my other accounts in the State Bank (of India) can now be easily linked with this account." he said as he walked out.

Customers of the former associate banks are, by and large, finding the merger of their banks with the SBI beneficial. "I don't really mind as long as the staff is not changed. This bank was very homely." said Bhagyashri Kale, a senior citizen who gets her pension at the same branch.

On April 1, the SBI merged its five associate banks and the Bhartiya Mahila Bank into itself, and began operations as a single entity. The branches of the former associate banks are presently easily distinguishable, with their re-branded signage set against a navy-blue backdrop.

Asked whether there was an added sense of security and stability by being with a larger bank, Rajendra Sagvekar, a Central Railway employee, said the only matter of concern for customers like him would be the possible over-crowding at the branches. "As other SBI customers can also avail themselves of services from my bank, there could be more crowd. But it's a good move, no doubt. SBBJ did not have much of online services; but now, SBI's apps will come in handy." Sagvekar said.

Over the past two weeks since the merger, customers have not been through much hassle as there has been no change in account numbers or even IFSC codes. In fact, most branches still use stationery with the old branding.

Umesh Kumar, Chief Manager at the corporate accounts branch of the former State Bank of Mysore at Churchgate, explained this is not an overnight change. "Right now, only the name of the banks has changed. The SBI will start the data-merging of the six banks from April 24, one by one. Then it decide on which branches to keep and which to close down. The bank has also announced a Voluntary Retirement Scheme, and about 800 employees of our bank have applied for it. So this way, the staff will also get reduced. And some employees will get transferred to branches which have shortage of staff. It is a matter of pride, as an employee, to be associated with such a big institution."

A corporate customer of the same branch said: "State Bank of Mysore had limited branches — there were only 25-30 branches in Mumbai; but now we can use any SBI branch," emphasising the ease of transaction that comes with the 22,000-strong branch network of the SBI.

(The writer is an intern with *BusinessLine* .)

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