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Title: Need to devolve powers to Panchayats and Municipalities in Puducherry.

PROF. M. RAMADASS (PONDICHERRY): Local bodies in the Union Territory of Puducherry were defunct and in a state of suspended animation for 38 years. They were revived only on 14.7.2006 when elections to them were held. Today, about 1138 local body members have taken position in these Bodies. But the powers, functions, functionaries and funds to these bodies have not yet been devolved as per the Constitutional requirements of 73rd and 74th Amendments. The Minister of Panchayati Raj, Government of India and the Chief Minister of Puducherry have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding in January, 2007, creating a Panchayat Sector window in the Budget. But this has not been done. The Government of Puducherry has only announced that it would constitute a committee to recommend devolution of powers. Already the State Finance Commission has clearly laid down detailed guidelines on devolution of power to village Panchayats and Municipalities. The Government has already delayed devolution for about 10 months which has created frustration and disenchantment among the local body members. They have already expressed their displeasure by organizing bandhs and hunger strikes. They are planning to come to Delhi and resort to agitation. Since the process of devolution is being delayed, the funds and other facilities from the Government of India are not likely to be transferred to Puducherry which may impede the process of development. The question of political and economic democracy are at stake in Puducherry which is against the Constitutional aspirations and requirements. Therefore, it is urged that the Government of India should order the devolution of powers immediately to local bodies.