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Local bodies getting more funds: Stalin

Special Correspondent

CHENNAI: Deputy Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Monday rebutted the Opposition criticism that less funds were being allocated to local bodies in the State.

Wrapping up a debate in the Assembly on the demands for grants to Municipal Administration, Water Supply, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Departments, Mr. Stalin said that the devolution of funds to local bodies was increased to 9.5 per cent of the State's Own Tax Revenue (SOTR) this year from 9 per cent last year. As a result, the sum provided for the local bodies was Rs.6,928 crore against Rs.6,241 crore last year, an increase of Rs.687 crore.

Pointing out that the government absorbed the expenditure of the local bodies for providing basic services such as primary education and water supply apart from salaries to employees, he said if these were to be included, the share would be 31 per cent of the SOTR.

He was responding to the observations of K. Balabharathy (Communist Party of India-Marxist), S. Gunasekaran (CPI), S. P. Velumani (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) and T. Sadhan Thirumalai Kumar (Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam).

To encourage best-performing panchayat level federations (PLFs), 1,000 PLFs would be selected this year and Rs.1 lakh each given as incentive.

To enable all women living below the poverty line to join and benefit from the Self Help Group (SHG) movement, it was estimated that one lakh new SHGs should be formed in the State. It

had been decided to form 50,000 new SHGs this year and another 50,000 next year.

On the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Mr. Stalin said Chief Minister had written to the Prime Minister, urging that the number of days of job should be increased from 100 to 150. Action was being initiated to enhance the minimum wages from Rs.80 to Rs.100.

This year, 30 more Samuthuvapurams would be established, for which the government had set apart Rs.75 crore.