Each morning brings tension instead of sunshine and cheer to the 96 Adivasi students of Pothaguda Tribal Welfare primary school, a satellite centre about 25 km from Adilabad town within picturesque hilly surroundings.

The inmates, aged between five and 12 years, have to walk to an open well a few hundred metres from the school to draw water — a dangerous proposition — even to brush teeth as their own source does not yield any water.

Parched, polluted
So acute is the water problem at this educational facility meant for the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group of Kolams that the students do not get to wash their bodies for a few days at a stretch and many have in fact left for home.

Water from the Mission Bhagiratha source is supplied every three or four days, but consumption has been barred as the water carries impurities from the pipes. The one toilet each for girls and boys is in disuse owing to faulty construction and that has children defecating in the open. The small water purification plant and the solar water heater, the only two things that work in the school, cannot function as those require water.

Official neglect
The 45 Kolam families of Pothaguda also face the same problem. They blame politicians and officials for the neglect which is causing them enormous problems every day.

“The whole purpose of providing good facilities to poor children so that they can learn in a conducive atmosphere gets defeated due to the neglect,” says Kodapa Tukaram, former sarpanch of Pothaguda. “No one comes here to check if things are running properly,” he adds.

“There are many schools in erstwhile united Adilabad district which face water shortage. These schools are usually located on high grounds and hillocks where the sources dry up at the start of every year,” points out Athram Ashok, a Kolam activist youth from Markaguda in Indervelli mandal.