

Aiming for the Other One Billion

By HEATHER TIMMONS

Courtesy of DataWind Suneet Singh Tuli, chief executive of DataWind, holding the company's low-cost tablet computer.

DataWind, the company behind the \$35 tablet computer unveiled by the Indian government on Wednesday, hopes to spark an Internet revolution in the country.

The company plans to offer a souped-up version of the tablet it is making for the government to the general public for 2,999 rupees (about \$61) by late November, packaged with unlimited Internet access that costs only 99 rupees a month (about \$2).

"I truly believe the revolution that happened in the mobile phone industry will extend to the Internet and personal computers" when prices are lowered, Suneet Singh Tuli, the chief executive of DataWind, said in a telephone interview.



Right now, the computer products available in India are inadequate for the country's 1.2 billion people, Mr. Tuli said. India's Internet penetration is far behind China's or that of developed nations, with just 18 million Internet subscribers, and an estimated 120 million Internet users. China, in contrast, has an estimated 500 million Internet users.

In India "there are one billion people left out," Mr. Tuli said, "and the way to include them is lower the price." Mobile phone use underwent what Mr. Tuli calls a revolution in India when the price of phones dropped below 2,000 rupees. India has more than 600 million mobile phone subscribers.

DataWind is in discussions with several private telecommunication providers, searching for a partner for the monthly tariff of 99 rupees. The commercial tablet also will make phone calls.

DataWind has pledged to make the tablet computers that will be bought by the government in India, after winning a contract tendered by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The ministry made a heartfelt appeal to DataWind to manufacture in India, Mr. Tuli said, but the company is under no obligation to do so.

The tablets sold for commercial use in India could be manufactured anywhere, including DataWind's traditional manufacturing center in China, but Mr. Tuli said he would prefer to make them in India.

Quad Electronics, an Andhra Pradesh company, made the initial tablets that were distributed on Wednesday in India. Production at Quad's manufacturing plant in Hyderabad has been impacted by recent protests demanding an independent state of Telanga, Mr. Tuli said.

"These issues over the last few months have had a direct impact on staff being able to show up to work."