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Is India's Elusive \$35 Laptop at Hand?

By PAMPOSH RAINA

NEW DELHI — The Indian government promised the world a \$35 laptop a year ago. In a few weeks it will deliver, said Kapil Sibal, minister for human resource development.

"All the naysayers will be unpleasantly surprised," Mr. Sibal said during an interview in his New Delhi office. He said he already has a version of the dirt-cheap laptop.

What's it look like?

Well, unfortunately, it was at home, not in the office, he said. "I must be able to work on it."

[Unveiling the prototype](#) of the laptop a year ago, Mr. Sibal flaunted the gadget as his answer to [Nicholas Negroponte's One Laptop Per Child](#) (O.L.P.C.) project, which aspires to develop a \$100 laptop. Currently there are three million children across 41 countries using the XO laptop developed by O.L.P.C., said Satish Jha, the India head of the project. But the current price of each laptop hovers around \$200, he said.

Mr. Sibal said last year that more than a million of the \$35 laptops would be mass-produced, though he didn't specify a time frame or disclose the manufacturer. The laptops, when they do arrive, will be sold to colleges and universities in India.

India is facing an education crisis, in part because there are not enough skilled teachers to meet the rising number of students. Development professionals and government officials hope online learning using the computers will bridge that gap.

Mr. Sibal's office declined to divulge details of the laptop's manufacturers or whether production had begun. When pressed for specifics, Mamta Varma, the spokeswoman for the ministry, had the same answer: "You will get to know in six weeks."

Despite India's prowess in information technology, technology experts have long been skeptical about this project because of the laptop's exceptionally low price.

And this is not the first time that India's human resource ministry has promised a low-cost computer device. Two years ago the [ministry announced](#) a plan to develop a \$10 laptop and unveiled a prototype, but many outsiders were unimpressed, [calling it](#) a "hand-held device, rather than a laptop."

Mr. Jha [coined the term](#) "laplet" last year to describe that device. The "laplet has been much announced and its arrival much awaited," he said.

In May last year Mr. Negroponte had [announced that his organization](#) may produce a laptop for as little as \$75. Last month, he said an under-\$100 laptop could be [ready next year](#) or perhaps sooner.

In India there are about 2,000 children who are participating in the One Laptop Per Child program.