

Govt plans to license 'brand Aakash'

Surabhi Agarwal | New Delhi June 19, 2013 Last Updated at 00:36 IST

Almost on the verge of being buried after a series of faux pas and controversies, the government is now trying to salvage its [low-cost tablet](#) project, [Aakash](#), by turning it into a brand name. Any government agency or private company meeting certain criteria and specifications would be able to use the brand, according to government officials directly involved in the matter.

An inter-ministerial panel has finalised a set of specifications for tablets and is in the process of laying down a procedure to license the brand name Aakash.

"The entire Aakash project was a government of India initiative but several companies are driving mileage out of its publicity by selling anything in the name of Aakash," said Rajat Moona, director general of the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing ([CDAC](#)), the government's technology research and development arm.

Private companies can 'license the Aakash logo' if they conform to the set specifications, Moona added. "The Centre for Development of [Telematics](#) may be roped in to award the licences, but the proposal is yet to be finalised."

The Aakash project was conceptualised in 2010 by the then Union minister of human resource development (HRD) Kapil Sibal as the world's cheapest tablet costing \$35 (Rs 2,060 today). This was to be indigenously developed as an educational tool for students. However, several controversies relating to the quality of the product and the delay in its delivery came up soon after the first Aakash tablet was unveiled in October 2011.

Recently, the HRD ministry said in the future, the government might focus more on building the infrastructure and the educational content rather than developing the hardware. This indicates the government might not go ahead with the earlier plan of distributing five million Aakash tablets after the pilot project involving 100,000 devices.

While the HRD ministry is still to figure out its plan of action with regard to Aakash, the scope of the tablet has expanded beyond educational institutes to segments such as e-governance and other government departments, a government official said.

"To make it easier for a government department to procure such devices and to ensure that certain quality standards are met, we are mandating these minimum specifications," said the official, requesting anonymity.

According to CDAC's Moona, while the basic specifications of the tablet will remain the same, the respective departments can develop applications relevant to their operations for the tablets.

The inter-ministerial panel will soon release the specifications after some final approvals, Moona added.

The comprises officials from the ministries of HRD, communications and information technology, along with several professors from various Indian Institutes of Technologies and CDAC.


As per the mandate, the tablet will have to have at least a 7-inch capacitive screen with one gigabyte

(GB) of Random Access Memory, and 4 GB of internal SD card memory expandable up to 32 GB.

The tablet should be Android-based (Google's mobile operating system) with an option to also support open source software Linux.

CHANGE OF STRATEGY

The government, in its efforts to salvage the Aakash low-cost tablet project, is trying to build it as a brand. To that end it plans to license the brand name. Here's what it entails



- The brand name could be used by both government agencies and private firms to sell their products if they meet the minimum criteria
- Officials say the move will stop the ongoing practice of companies selling below-standard products in the name of Aakash
- Mandating certain basic specifications for the tablet will also help government agencies procure the devices while ensuring quality
- Telecom development agency C-DOT could be roped in to grant licences

For the name

Minimum specifications mandated for any product using Aakash name

7-inch screen	1 GB of random access memory	4 GB of internal memory, expandable up to 32 GB	Device should run Android-based operating system, with an option for open to run Linux
----------------------	-------------------------------------	--	---