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Govt to take away Aakash deal from IIT-Rajasthan

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NEW DELHI: The government has decided to take future tendering and procurement for [Aakash2 tablets](#) from IIT Rajasthan, and hand it over to public sector undertakings. The decision comes in the wake of a spat between IIT-Rajasthan, current procurement agency for Aakash and the tablet's current maker Datawind, which has led to a stoppage of supplies.

"We have realised that educational institutes are not capable of handling tenders as it involves large sums of money and handling vendors. Public sector undertakings are much better equipped to handle it," said a government official, involved with the billion-dollar fund for National Mission for Education through [ICT](#), under the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

As per sources, PSUs such as [ITI Ltd](#) [BSE 0.00 %](#) or [Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd](#) (TCIL) might be considered for procurement of Aakash 2 tablets.

The drafting of specifications and features of Aakash 2 tablets has also been taken away from [IIT Rajasthan](#) and given over to the Department of IT, Ministry of Communications and IT.

The IT Ministry is chairing a committee over future specifications of Aakash 2, which is likely to include a capacitive touchscreen and 1GHz processor, at the same price of \$35. Success of India's low-cost computing initiative has made governments such as Thailand, [Panama](#) [BSE 14.24 %](#), Italy express interest to the Ministry of External Affairs for procurement of tablets for their countries.

The mandate for Aakash 2 lies with the National Mission for Education through ICT, under the Ministry of HRD. Over 70% of the billion-dollar fund sanctioned for NME-ICT is spent, and the expiry of the five-year fund. is nearing by March 31. This has led MHRD minister [Kapil Sibal](#) to announce that the government is planning to bring the second version of the tablet Aakash 2 by April this year.

The new tender for Aakash 2 is likely to be of over one million units, and divided between two to three vendors. The spat between Datawind and IIT Rajasthan reached its climax last month, when Datawind declined to accept IIT's military level specifications for Aakash. IIT-Rajasthan had prescribed a rain and shockproof Aakash tablet while Datawind declined the features saying it is impossible to make such rugged tablets for \$35.

The vendor also complained to IIT-Rajasthan of non-payment for the supplied 10,000 units.

IIT-Rajasthan declined to comment to ET on the story. The Ministry of HRD has declined to intervene in their spat, citing it as a 'commercial dispute' between vendor and procurer. The dispute has led to a delay. Students have still not received the tablets, even a year after the tender was out for the world's cheapest tablet.