

## Who will make the Rs 2,500 Aakash 4 tablet?

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**New Delhi:** Handset makers which have manufacturing plants in the country have expressed interest in bidding for Aakash 4 tablet order but are finding it difficult to maintain the price level of Rs 2,500 apiece in the absence of government support.

Canadian phone maker Datawind which has supplied about 1,00,000 low-cost Aakash tablets to the government till date says that it would be a challenge to supply the device at Rs 2,500 a unit due to rupee volatility and other factors.

"We will be able to bid for Aakash 4 at a price below Rs 2,500 a unit. However, it is a challenge to maintain it at that level. We have seen fluctuation of about 20 per cent in the value of rupee and the uncertainty remains," Datawind CEO Suneet Singh Tuli told PTI.



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The Aakash project was Union minister Kapil Sibal's brainchild when he was the HRD Minister. The idea was to provide low-cost computing device at subsidised rate to students to enable them access internet for educational purposes.

The Directorate General of Supplies & Disposals has floated a tender for the latest Aakash tablet with technical specifications of 7-inch scratch resistant capacitive touch

screen, Wi-Fi, 2G, 3G and 4G connectivity, 4GB internal storage, external memory card slot with storage

capacity of up to 32 GB, front camera etc.

However, the number of units to be supplied has not been mentioned in the tender. The last date for submission of bids has again been deferred till January 28.

Telecom Minister Kapil Sibal had said that the government wanted a price of around Rs 2,500 for the latest device.

Besides Datawind, domestic handset maker Simmtronics and other vendors, who wished not to be named, expressed interest in bidding for the latest Aakash tablet order.

Simmtronics said its "price will be competitive", but did not reveal the likely price to be quoted in the bid. "Low quality products will fail to qualify technical bids.

We will qualify but maintaining desired price level in present form is a challenge as most of the components are imported.

"There are duties on components which should be waived as Aakash 4 will be supplied to government," company's Managing Director Indrajit Sabharwal said, adding that multinational chipset companies have approached it to supply processors at minimal cost.

A company, which plans to set up manufacturing unit in the country, said it does not expect a quality product can be supplied for Rs 2,500 as desired by Sibal.

"Government wants talk time of 20 hours which even high-end phones don't give. Its not possible to match price as desired by minister (Sibal)," a top official of a company,

which partnered with a PSU for selling tablets, said.

Another vendor which plans to bid expressed disappointment on lack of government support for the project.

"We have been asked to quote price of product but have not been informed about the number that we need to supply. There is a huge risk and we expect only 4-5 companies to bid for this project," a company official said.

The government last week had said it will not allow vendors to change price quoted in the bids due to fluctuation in the value of rupee.

Also, industry sources said that multinational companies have withdrawn from bidding as they will be unable to comply with Preferential Market Access rules incorporated in

the tender, whereby tablets for supply to central government should have at least 30 per cent of components made in India.