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'Ultra-low-cost' access device introduced

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Interesting prototype unveiled at launch of the National Mission on Education

— Photo: K.V. Poornachandra Kumar

To bridge a divide: At the unveiling of the prototype of the 'ultra low-cost' access-cum-computing device, at Tirupati on Tuesday.

TIRUPATI: The Ministry of Human Resource Development unveiled here on Tuesday what has been tagged as an "ultra low-cost" computing-cum-access device that can "make wonders" in the dissemination of education to the remotest corners of India.



With talk of the "introduction" of a laptop costing Rs.500 making the rounds, the prototype of the device was introduced to the delegates as well as Union HRD Minister Arjun Singh, Minister of State D. Purandareswari and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy during the formal launch of the National Mission on Education through Information and Computer Technology on the Sri Venkateswara University campus.

The 10" long and 5" wide hand-held device, resembling a palmtop or a modem, helps e-learners access the Web easily. Priced versions of e-content available on the Net can be accessed through this device.

The cost of the device shot up to between \$20 and \$30 against the initial plan to peg it at \$10, forcing the department to resort to a cost-cutting exercise. R.P. Agarwal, Secretary, Ministry of Higher Education, who displayed the prototype to the delegates, expressed confidence that the cost would be brought down further.

In an elaborate presentation, N.K. Sinha, Joint Secretary, Ministry of HRD, explained that the prototype bore testimony to India's technological capability, with some of the components developed by engineering students themselves.

He said the aim was to make the device cost something close to that a student would have to spend on textbooks for a year. "If bandwidth charges fall further, the device can work wonders," he said.