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Meet Aakash, India's \$35 'Laptop'

By PAMPOSH RAINA AND HEATHER TIMMONS

The [long-awaited](#) \$35 laptop is here, the Indian government said on Wednesday.

Kapil Sibal, India's minister for human resources development unveiled "Aakash," a tablet computer that will cost the ministry 2276 Indian rupees, or \$50, at a press conference in New Delhi.

Free tablets were distributed to 500 students invited from across India to the event. The government will be providing subsidies to students to bring the cost down to about \$35.

The tablet, which has a seven-inch touch screen and 256 megabytes of RAM, will use the Android 2.2 operating system from Google and has two USB ports.

The Indian government [pledged in 2009](#) that it would introduce a super-cheap laptop in order to improve the quality of education in the country through technology. Since then the project has been hit by delays and snags – critics called a first prototype "[nothing more than a souped-up USB memory stick](#)."

DataWind, a company founded in 2001 by two brothers who live in Canada, Suneet and Raja Tuli, won the tender for the tablet, beating out several other bidders. The company's research and development is based in Montreal, but its products were, until now, mainly sold in the Britain, where it is registered as an LLC or limited liability company.

DataWind sold about 100,000 units of its web-searching devices this year, including the "PocketSurfer," which is the size of a checkbook, said Alia Khan, the vice president of British operations, in a phone interview. The deal with the ministry represents a radical change in strategy for DataWind.

Unlike DataWind's other products, which are made in China, the new device will be manufactured in India, Ms. Khan said, by a company called Quad. DataWind won the tender from the government to provide 100,000 devices, beating out several other bidders, Ms. Khan said. If the trial run is successful, "the next order is for one million units," she said.

An executive at Quad Electronics in Secunderabad, Andhra Pradesh, confirmed in a telephone interview that his company would be manufacturing the tablets in India, but said he did not want to be identified because he was not supposed to be discussing specifics of the project. The company, which has been manufacturing electronics like modems and wireless routers for the past 14 years, has 900 employees, and is now manufacturing 700 tablets a day.

This is a new product for Quad, he said, adding "we have never manufactured a tablet before."