

Kapil Sibal's low-cost Aakash tablet may be shelved

Sanjay Singh | [Mail Today](#) | New Delhi, January 13, 2012 | UPDATED 11:46 IST

The Union human resource development (HRD) ministry may refuse to extend the letter of credit (LC) to [Montreal-based DataWind](#), the makers of the [world's cheapest computer tablet](#), [Aakash](#), priced at Rs.2,250 after a series of faults were detected, owing to which buyers have largely dumped it.

[Aakash tablets](#) were created specifically for students with the aim of bridging the 'digital divide' between the rich and the poor. The government now plans to dump these problematic tabs to rural villages.

Worse still is the fact that the entire project launched with much fanfare by [HRD minister Kapil Sibal](#) in October last year could be shelved.

Sources said the idea conceptualised by Sibal for an affordable tablet has been hijacked by corporate giant, Mukesh-Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL), which plans to launch its fourth generation (4G) services later this year and sell tablets at cheap price of around Rs.3,500.

Industry observers said Mukesh's RIL could probably team up with DataWind or with any other entity to launch 4G services in India. RIL is the only company to have pan-India spectrum to offer wireless broadband services on the 4G technology platform, having paid Rs.13,000 crore for these airwaves.

The 4G, also called longterm evolution (LTE), will have much higher speed than 3G and many telecom companies are gearing up for its worldwide launch early this year.

The HRD ministry had initially placed an order for one lakh units with DataWind. It received 30,000 Aakash tabs as part of the pilot run. But it proved a disaster after poor the feedback received concerning these tabs.

The tablets distributed among students under the pilot run had an Android 2.2 operating system, a seven-inch touchscreen, a 366 MHz processor, two USB ports, a multimedia player and 180 minutes of battery power. Instead of the 366 MHz processor, the improved Aakash will have a 766 MHz processor and a battery with a better life.

Sources said DataWind had reportedly refused to upgrade the second tranche of 70,000 Aakash tablets with improved specifications, for which it sought more funds. However, it will supply the second tranche of improved Aakash tablets at the original price of Rs.2,250.

But IIT-Rajasthan, which is a tendering authority for the Aakash project has not come out with the new testing standards so far. The HRD ministry is looking for new vendors to sell the second tranche of 70,000 improved tablets from DataWind.

Authorities said this is a clear indication that DataWind's LC will not be extended, which lapses this month-end. It will now be supplied by other agency and not DataWind.

But the promoter of DataWind, Suneet S. Tuli, has successfully managed to get over 20 lakh bookings for the improved and upgraded version of the Aakash tablet in the open market where it costs Rs.749

more at Rs.2,999.

Tuli was not available for comments. However, company official claimed that their LC would be extended beyond January 30. "We have not been paid for 30,000 tablets which we have supplied so far," the official complained.