



## Finally, a glimpse of the \$10 laptop

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*The Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry unveiled a low-cost computing device — a \$10 (less than Rs 500) laptop prototype — in Tirupati on Tuesday. To be launched in six months, the device has generated curiosity coupled with quite some skepticism across the international media. Here is a peek into the dream device:*

•**How it started:** The idea hit the Indian Government first when Nicholas Negroponte of MIT Media Laboratory came up with his aggressively marketed one-laptop-per-child (OLPC) scheme. When Negroponte offered a \$100 laptop and even made a presentation to this Government on his OLPC plan, it was turned down in 2006 by the Arjun Singh-led HRD Ministry on several grounds. Besides asserting that the actual cost would drive up to \$200, the ministry also contended that the “extensive exposure to the computer implicit in OLPC is worrisome” and could have adverse effects on the rather vulnerable age group of 6-12.

•**What revived the plan:** Though the HRD Ministry rejected the Negroponte proposal, it caught the imagination of the PMO and the Planning Commission. Finally the HRD Ministry asked IIT Madras to help with the creation of a ‘low cost device’ that would cost as less as \$10.

•**The team:** IIT Madras director M S Ananth is closely involved with the project, which also has students from the IIT, IISc Bangalore, Velore Institute of Technology among others as members of the core team developing the device. The Semiconductor Laboratory under the Department of Space is also helping to anchor the ambitious project to create probably the world’s cheapest laptop. The HRD Ministry also claims that it is in talks with several chip manufacturers like Intel to get the plan moving.

•**Project status:** The core team has managed to created a prototype that costs around \$20. “The challenge is to bring this down further to \$10 and we are working on it”, Secretary Higher Education in the HRD ministry, R P Agarwal recently said.

•**What’s in it:** Ministry sources say the device will come with a 2GB RAM, wi-fi and broadband landline connectivity facilities, a USB port, a small screen and keyboard and will be powered with a 2Watt system to suit even villages and areas with poor power supply. Efforts are on to explore ways to power it with solar energy and dynamo-run cheap systems. While the \$10 laptop will come at that price tag with certain workable minimum features, there will be the possibility of adding on a host of other features like expandable memory — at your own cost, of course.

•**What the Govt plans to do with it:** The plan is to make the device available to all, subsidise the cost for students and institutes and still make it available commercially. The ministry hopes to make a start in six months. The low cost laptop/notebook is posited as a befitting answer to the Negroponte OLPC and a technology based strongly on domestic skill.