IIT Madras ready with tech specification to make Aakash 4

Bhaskar Ramamurthi, Director, IIT Madras

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The Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, is ready with the technical specification to manufacture Aakash 4, the ultra low-cost tablet personal computer for students.

Likely to be priced at $50-$60 (less than Rs. 2,000), the Aakash 4 tablet will be an upgraded version of Aakash 2.

The project driven under the guidance of Ashok Jhunjhunwala, Professor, Department of Electrical Engineering, IIT Madras, the Aakash 4 tablets will be based on open specification.

This means multiple vendors can manufacture the tablets unlike the Aakash 2, an Android-based tablet computer that was developed by the British company Datawind.

There was some confusion, but the Centre has finally decided to go ahead with Aakash 4. Around ten vendors, including big players such as HP, Lenovo and Dell, have evinced interest in developing the low-cost tablets, said Prof Bhaskar Ramamurthi, Director, IIT Madras.

"They [the vendors] have come to the conclusion that the specification that has been made here is good enough for use in education. Is it comparable to iPad, of course not. It is not a toy, but will be of use for the students. That's all I know," he told *Business Line*. The Government will issue the tender and the vendors need to bid to mass manufacture the product, he said.

The Aakash 4 tablets will be delivered through non-commercial channels. This means, the Government will procure and sell to students directly. There will not be any financing cost or marketing cost, and no tax on the product. Students will pay only for the actual material cost. If the same unit is sold in the market, the cost will be easily doubled, he said.

Recently, Union IT and Telecom Minister Kapil Sibal clarified that the ultra low-cost Aakash tablet is "alive and kicking" and the Government was working on the third and fourth generation of the tablet. In fact, the Aakash project was his brainchild when he was the Minister for Human Resources Development.

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