

# Aakash, Cheapest Tablet, Launched

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NEW DELHI

The world's cheapest tablet computer was launched in India on Wednesday with 500 school students becoming the first few recipients. Telecom and HRD minister Kapil Sibal launched the tablet – Aakash – priced at \$35 (₹1,750) for students pursuing graduation and said that the government aimed to increase production to bring down the cost of the tablet to less than \$10 (₹500).

The government is sourcing the tablet from UK-based Datawind at ₹2,256 – inclusive of all taxes, levies, freight and insurance charges, servicing and documentation. The first lot of 100,000 tablets will be provided to states at ₹1,750 per tablet. "Our ultimate aim is that in the coming years this tablet should cost less than \$10. Datawind has said that if an order of one million units is placed the cost of the tablet (to the government) would be ₹1,750 (\$35), on which the government will offer a 50% subsidy (while giving it to students)," Sibal said.

He added that the private sector was also interested in providing subsidy to help the government achieve the sub-\$10 cost for the tablet.

Aakash is the first government initiative in the crowded tablet market in India, with more than a dozen Indian and multinational tablet makers vying for a share of the three-lakh-units-a-year market. The world's cheapest tablet comes to India at a time when Apple's iPad holds more than half the market, followed by Samsung's Galaxy that has cornered roughly a quarter and the rest of the turf occupied by low-cost manufacturers.

The \$35-tablet is Wi-Fi enabled with a 7-inch touch screen and is based on Google's Android 2.2 operating system. It has an internal storage capacity of 2GB which can be increased to 32 GB with an SD card, a battery back-up of nearly three hours and two USB ports.

Datawind, which makes the tablet in Hyderabad at 700 units a day, will begin selling the tablet commercially by end of November at ₹2,999 with a year-long warranty, under the brand name of UbiSlate, the company's chief executive officer Suneet Singh Tuli said. UbiSlate will come with an inbuilt 2G SIM for web access, with an internet plan at ₹99 per month, from an Indian mobile operator, which Datawind is finalising as of now.