

1.4 million orders for world's cheapest tablet in India

Datawind, the British Company contracted by the Indian Government to manufacture Aakash, said it had been taken by surprise by the response in India, where Apple's iPad computers costs a minimum of \$600.

The world's cheapest tablet computer has clocked 1.4 million bookings since it was put up for sale online two weeks ago in India, a spokeswoman told AFP on Tuesday.

Bookings for the long-awaited Aakash, pegged at 2,500 rupees (\$41), began on December 14, two months after it was unveiled as the "computer for the masses" in India where millions struggle to fund their education.

Datawind, the British company contracted by the Indian government to manufacture Aakash, said it had been taken by surprise by the response in India, where Apple's iPad computers costs a minimum of \$600. "The current response is overwhelming," a spokeswoman at the company's New Delhi PR agency told AFP in an email that detailed the number of bookings made so far.

Datawind is now taking orders for an upgraded version, called Ubislate 7 for March, and it will establish three new factories in 2012 to cope with the rush of orders.

"We plan to produce 75,000 units per factory per month from around April," the spokeswoman said.

The Economic Times in its

online edition said the makers had run out of stock of Aakash, which has a seven-inch (18-centimetre) touchscreen, Wi-Fi Internet function, a multimedia player and 180 minutes of battery power.

The business daily said with around 400,000 pre-sales bookings for the Aakash, sales of the device were more than sales for the entire Indian tablet market last year which numbered about 250,000-300,000 units.

The stylish, locally-made Aakash uses an Android 2.2 operating system and has an external 2GB storage card and two USB ports.

Critics had warned the device might struggle to live up to expectations with its limited 256-megabyte random access memory (RAM).

The price of what has been dubbed "the world's cheapest computer" should fall to \$35 and could even be hammered down as low as \$10, DataWind has said.

The Aakash is part of a push to increase the number of students in higher education and to give them the technological skills needed to further boost the country's recent rapid economic growth. **AFP**