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## Bridge digital divide @ Rs 10,000



SANJAY ANAND

TIMES NEWS NETWORK [ WEDNESDAY, MAY 11, 2005 12:36:16 AM ]

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NEW DELHI: It looks like India is set to bridge the digital divide much earlier than expected. The successful introduction of personal computers at a price of Rs 10,000 or below has made it within the reach of virtually everyone and that, in turn, has poised the country for a digital revolution.

The digital divide - the gap in IT access between rich and poor - was expected to create a new category of haves and have-nots. But the Rs 10,000-computer in India is bridging the divide. Companies like Xenitis, Encore Software and Celetronix are pushing prices down.

"The PC is getting divided into many uses and user segments, from kids to housewives. It has become absolutely necessary for commerce, school projects, writing letters and so on," said Shantanu Ghosh, chairman of Xenitis. He said local brands would have to cater to this opportunity.

Xenitis launched a Rs 10,000-PC in West Bengal called Amar PC. It's success was resounding - it has now taken its PC to the Hindi heartland, calling it Apna PC, to Maharashtra by the name of Aamchi PC, and to the south as well. And Xenitis isn't the only one.

On Tuesday, science & technology minister Kapil Sibal launched an "affordable" mobile desktop computer, Mobilis. This, too, would for about Rs 10,000 if Mobilis reaches volumes of 50,000.

The PC is increasingly being required in schools, colleges, shops, by accountants, lawyers, housewives - virtually anyone who is educated. And the cheap PC is within reach of all these people if price point is around Rs 10,000 and easy finance is available.

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Said Vinnie Mehta, ED of Mait, India's hardware lobby: "Easy financing will encourage people to buy PCs. There are rules in government organisations, for instance, where only officials at relatively senior levels get the benefit of finance. Actually, it should be ensured that people below a certain level get the incentive."

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These experts say that access to computers that have broadband Internet are necessary to spread healthcare, education and economic prosperity to smaller towns and villages. To get there, you need low-cost PCs. They cite the example of TVs and, more recently, mobile handsets: The spread of each accelerated only after prices dropped below Rs 10,000.

Unfolding a roadmap, IT minister Dayanidhi Maran had said Rs 9,999 would be price point that would ramp up low PC penetration.

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