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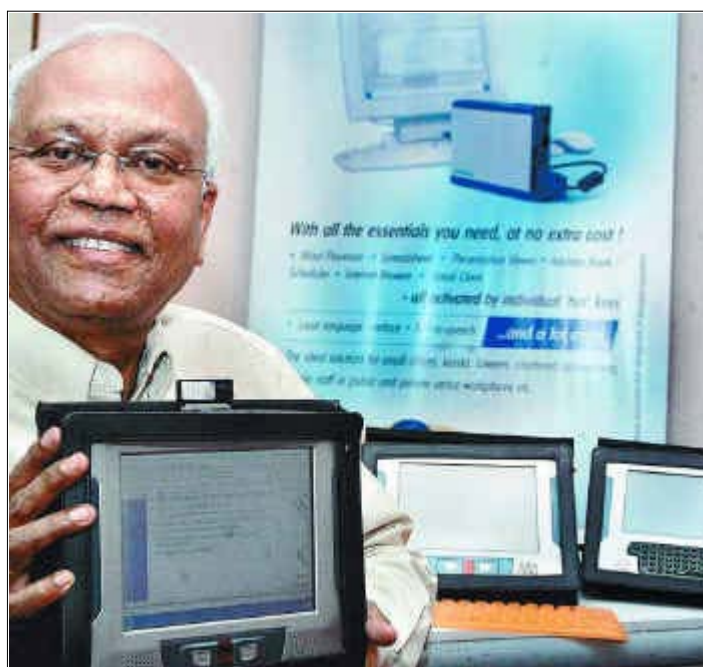Front Page

Here comes the no-frills, mobile computer system

P. Sunderarajan

Three models that offer the essential features of a conventional PC

It will have no hard disk but will have built-in memory

A BREAKTHROUGH: Dr. R.A. Mashelkar, Director-General, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, displays new mobile computers in New Delhi on Tuesday. The products are Mobilis, a Linux-based mobile desktop with a 7.4-inch LCD screen, and two of its variants — Mobilis Wireless and SoftComp, an ultra-compact desktop. The computers

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can run on batteries and will be priced between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 20,000. — Photo: Kamal Narang
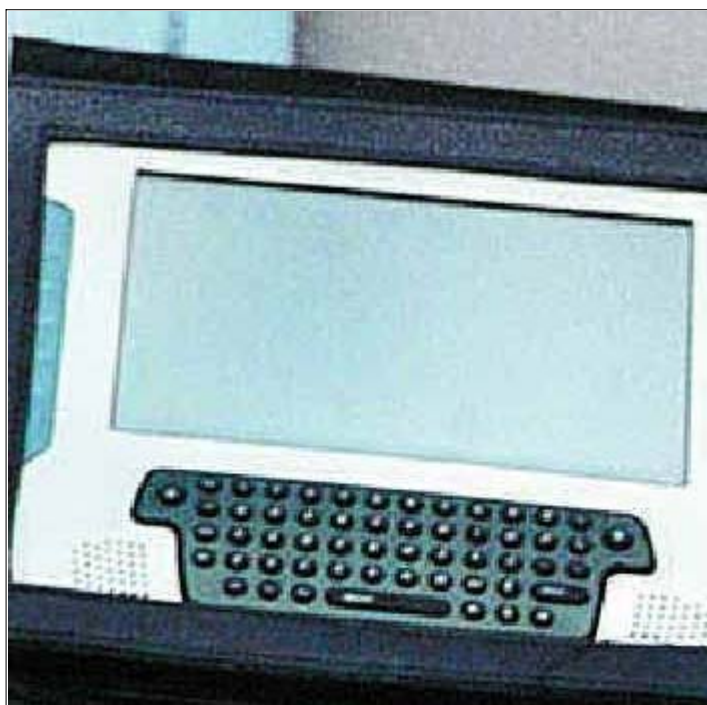
NEW DELHI: A computer, a mobile one, for Rs.10,000? A Bangalore-based company on Tuesday announced the development of such a system under a project sponsored by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). It is expected to be available commercially in three months.

Vinay L. Deshpande, chairman and chief executive officer of Encore Software, told a press conference the system would have the essential features of a conventional personal computer: everyday applications such as word processing, spreadsheet, personal information manager, e-mail and web-browser. It will play music and movies, have text-to-speech conversion facility and built-in local-language support. For now, Kannada, Hindi, and Marathi; work is in progress on Tamil and Telugu. It will weigh 500 gm and be compact. It can be synchronised with a regular PC, "considering that it [a PC] cannot be wished away.''

It will have no hard disk but will have built-in memory and facility to plug in memory cards for any storage over and above that provided for in the built-in memory. It will not have games. High-speed computing is ruled out. The reasoning is that "while adding to the cost, these are of no use to many users.''

The main aim, Mr. Deshpande said, was to develop a system that was affordable and provided the essential features, "without the unnecessary fluff of the conventional systems.'' The target audience is households, small shops, professionals such as lawyers and chartered accountants, and field staff of pharmaceutical, insurance and other industries. It could be used as e-book readers by educational institutions, for telemedicine and as a nurse's aide.

A U.S.-based housing solutions provider has evinced interest

to use it for a building security system. ITC wants to use it for its e-chaupal programme. Several institutions in India and South Africa want to use it in education.

The power source will be a rechargeable battery with a life of more than six hours per charge. The system is meant to be used in all conditions. It will have built-in ethernet and analogue modem, and optional built-in fingertip sensor for use as a kiosk terminal.

Three models have been developed. The basic model, called Softcom, will be a desktop costing less than Rs. 10,000, including a 15-inch monitor. The second model, Mobilis, could be used as a desktop and a laptop. It comes with an innovative carry-case that opens up as a desktop stand and a keyboard that could be rolled up and kept in a pouch of the carry-case when the user is on the move. It would cost between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 15,000. The third model, Mobilis Wireless, will cost between Rs. 15,000 and Rs. 20,000. This one will offer a built-in GPS receiver and GPRS wireless modem as additional options.

Launching the system, Union Science and Technology Minister Kapil Sibal hoped it will open up innovative applications and help spread the information technology revolution. He said it was a proud day for the CSIR as it was developed under its NMITLI (New Millennium Indian Technology Leadership Initiative) programme.

The CSIR has funded 37 projects involving 65 industry partners and 175 R&D institutions with an outlay of Rs. 270 crores under the NMITLI. For this project it provided Rs. 3 crores. Scientists from top institutions, including Ashok Jhunjhunwala of the Indian Institute of Technology Chennai and N. Balakrishnan of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, guided it.

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