

A HAND-HELD PC FOR KEEPING IN TOUCH

Jawans Get A High-Tech Sathi To Roam Around

Pragati Verma NEW DELHI 22 DECEMBER

THIS home-grown technology could prove to be one of Indian army's best "sathi"! Picture Indian army soldiers on the battlefield carrying indigenously developed handheld PCs called Sathi, constantly tracking each other's positions and even jointly planning moves on the front as well as sharing details on maps with command headquarters. Sounds futuristic? Well, a pilot project has already been implemented in J& K and the army is now extending the technology to other areas.

For the first time, Indian army has outsourced an R&D project to a private company instead of developing at DRDO. And there's much more to the gadget over and above its desi appeal as other armies are believed to have evinced interest in the device. Indian army also explored other options like RPDA from Talla Tech used by the US army in Iraq but zeroed on the much cheaper and better integrated Sathi.

Developed by Encore, which designed India's first handheld computer, Sathi is an integrated battle computer with Global Positioning System (GPS) and radio, customised Geographical Information System (GIS) – a navigational tool displaying military maps and location of other devices – and enabling field sketches with a customised symbol library for map marking. Weighing 875 gm, it can easily fit into a soldier's palm and also has a remotely operated self-destruction and activation feature for preventing misuse by unauthorized persons.

"Encore developed and manufactured this handheld computer for deployment by the Indian Army in battlefield surveillance, target designation, fire control and battlefield management systems, in a record two years," says Samyeer Metrani, head (Mobile Computing Products), Encore Software.

Indian army has already acquired 120 handhelds in a pilot project at J & K and will now extend this to other areas. Having initiated by General Mehta, army commander Northern command, the battlefield handheld PC managed to impress the President, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, who remarked while talking to forces, "When I saw a soldier holding the BAAZ (army's codename for Sathi), I am reminded of the smart soldier of the 21st century."

Been developed exclusively for the Indian army initially, Sathi can now be sold to other armies too. Its developers at Encore claim that they are already in preliminary talks with many armies around the world. Encore also claims that this is the first army project to be developed from conception to product stage in less than two years.

