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Simputer to bridge divide

AFP in Bangalore

MAY 08, 2001

FOUR scientists from India's premier science institute and three entrepreneurs have unveiled a prototype of the "Simputer" - a pc handheld computer for the rural masses.

The 32Mb Linux-based touchscreen Simputer (Simple Computer) costs 9000 rupees (\$368) and provides internet connectivity through a dial-up modem.

Based on a free software from Open Source Initiative, the Simputer uses a new Information Markup Language (IML) as its application interface and an open, modular software technology.

It also features a smart card facility for making financial transactions on the internet and added services such as home shopping and ATMs.

"It is really tragic to observe that even though India considers its software superpower, it has done nothing about the deployment technology for the benefit of the masses," says Vinay Deshpande of Simputer Trust.

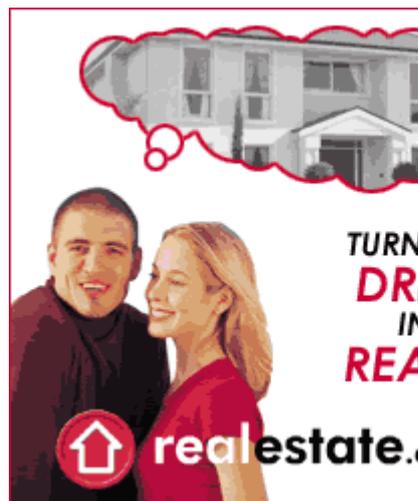
"A large section of the population remains blissfully ignorant of this digital revolution. We cannot expect any multinationals to come to our aid on this front."

Deshpande is among the three private software engineers along with two others from the Indian Institute of Science who formed the Simputer Trust.

The trust, a non-profit entity, was focussed on developing a low-cost, low-power computing device.

"This product will bridge the digital divide. We are planning to go to mass commercial production within a year. It will have applications in micro-banking and many other sectors," he says.

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"The most important aspect is the computer is multi-lingual."

The device has "text-to-speech" capability in local Indian languages.

The company has granted licences to three domestic firms for the Simputer. It could be made by other nations for a fee.



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