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THE HINDU Business Line



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HK co plans drive to bridge digital divide

To make available simplified PC, free, for low-income groups

Our Bureau
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A SIMPLIFIED version of a personal computer for low-income sections of society, for free!

The Hong-Kong based Asiatotal.net on Friday announced its intention is to sell these PCs in bulk to companies in emerging markets. These will, in turn, distribute the devices free in the rural areas as part of their corporate social responsibility.

"This will signify the beginning of the end of the digital divide. Individuals and small businesses will gain access to healthcare, social, educational and economic opportunities over the Internet," said Ms Judy S Chen, President and CEO, Asiatotal.net.

Asiatotal.net expects the telecom, consumer business, financial services, healthcare and entertainment sectors to be interested. "At this point, we don't have designated local participating companies," said Ms Chen.

Local sponsors will distribute the computer to low-income individuals who do not own a PC. The company will manufacture 3 million units per month for this global initiative. Communities in Latin America, China, India, Russia, Continental and Eastern Europe, South Africa, Mexico, the Philippines and West Asia

have been targeted.

The PC has been designed, developed and manufactured by the Taiwan-based Biostar. The first 200,000 units will be dispatched to Brazil soon.

The computer is modelled on the lines of a laptop, but is smaller and lighter. A 7-inch flat screen TFT monitor carrying speakers is connected to a unique keyboard. This offers direct access to Internet Web sites via 14 keys, which will open up Web pages of sponsors.

The PC runs on the Windows CE operating system, which can be upgraded to Windows XP. It does not use a hard disk, and 40 MB storage has been enabled on the chip. It can be used to store MP3s and video files. Hence the device, IT, can be used to play songs or watch a movie. It can also be connected to a TV, printer and speakers, and offers one USB port, to plug in a pen drive.

A 56 kbps internal modem enables dial-up Internet connectivity. A higher capacity modem can also be connected for broadband. Localisation has been taken care of with the inclusion of language software such as Hindi. An optical mouse and smart card reader are included in the package. The PC will come with a warranty of one year, and is expected to have a lifetime of 3-5 years.



CONNECTING THE WORLD FOR FREE: Ms Judy S. Chen, President and CEO, Asiatotal.net, displaying the free computer to be distributed to the low-income groups by local sponsors, at its launch in Bangalore on Friday. — G.R.N. Somashekhar