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Poor rural Thai students to get 100-dollar laptops

BANGKOK: In Thailand's remote villages, where many people still live without electricity, impoverished students struggle to pay for meals and books.

Yet they could soon be tapping away on brand new laptop computers under a project called "One Laptop per Child", which aims to bring cheap technology to the world's poor.

Thailand hopes to order one million laptops from the initiative, launched by the United States' Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and distribute them free to rural primary school children.

The device itself, the XO-1 laptop, is no ordinary gadget. Academics and industry experts have designed it from scratch to be funky, durable and capable -- for a price tag of just 100 dollars.
The computer comes with a wireless Internet connection and webcam despite its low cost, and is thought capable of withstanding wear and tear in the kingdom's rural regions.

"Kids in the developing world need the newest technology, especially really rugged hardware and innovative software," said One Laptop per Child (OLPC) chairman Nicholas Negroponte.

"They are a wonderful way for all children to 'learn learning' through independent interaction and exploration," said Negroponte, who visited Bangkok earlier this month with the OLPC project.

Thailand is one of five developing countries along with Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria and Libya slated to receive the first batch of the laptops, with production expected to begin mid-2007.