

# DATELINE PHILIPPINES

## 10 bidders eye automation contract

by SHEILA CRISOSTOMO  
Philstar.com



Bayan Muna Representative Teddy Casiño

TEN bidders will compete for the lease contracts to supply automation machines to be used by the Commission on Elections (Comelec) in next year's local and national polls.

In a telephone interview, Comelec Chairman Jose Melo said the poll body was "very satisfied" with the number of companies that bought the terms of reference (TOR).

"The response was so good. We are happy that many bidders are interested to participate in the bidding," Melo said.

The bidders are Smartmatic/Total Information Management, Avante International Technology Inc., Syrex Corp./Scantron, DVS Philippines/Samsung, Indra Sistemas S.A., Universal Storefront Services Co./Sequioa, All Data Hub International Inc., Gilat Satellite Network Ltd., AMA Group Holding Corp./ES&S International, and Mega Data Corp.

To participate in the bidding, the firms were required to buy the TOR for \$20,000 or P1 million. TOR is the document that contains the technical and financial requirements that they have to meet to win the contract.

The bidders will be allowed to raise their concerns during a pre-bid conference last March 27 at the Comelec main office in Intramuros, Manila.

A fact sheet released by the Comelec showed that the conference "is the opportunity for those who purchase the TOR to discuss with the Special Bids and Awards Committee the contents of the bid documents."

"These concerns may cover a wide range of matters—anything from complex questions regarding technical specifications to simple requests for clarification," Melo said.

Meanwhile, Bayan Muna staged a rally in front of Comelec office to oppose poll automation, saying this is only a "recipe for automated cheating and big-time graft."

"We know that the bid documents are already out, but even at this stage, we appeal to the Comelec to reconsider its mode of choice for automation in 2010. The PCOS (precinct count optical scan) system is untested and a logistical nightmare that opens more avenues for large-scale automated cheating and disenfranchisement, said Bayan Muna Rep. Teddy Casiño.

Casiño said what needs to be automated is not the voting and counting "which is open, verifiable and subject to protection by voters and election watchdogs," but the transmission, canvassing and consolidation of votes because it is at this level that cheating occurs. ■

## Melo reiterates plebiscite before 2010 polls not possible

by SHEILA CRISOSTOMO  
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COMMISSION on Elections Chairman Jose Melo reiterated last March 26 that it is impossible to hold a plebiscite for the amendment of the Constitution before the 2010 elections due to lack of time.

"It would be very difficult to do. It might not happen anymore for lack of time," Melo said, but added that it depends on Congress and if the lawmakers order it, the Comelec would have to follow.

He said the Comelec is now busy preparing for the automation of the May 2010 general elections.

Melo claimed that if a plebiscite would really be held, it might be included in next year's elections to save time and money.

"Maybe, after voting for local and national officials, the voters can also (vote on) the plebiscite. Maybe we can also print that in the ballots," Melo said.

He could not ascertain when the amendments should take effect.

"It's up to Congress. Let them decide. But if the amendment is done before the elections, there are many speculations like term extension," Melo added.

Speaker Prospero Nograles said although time is fast running out on the Charter change (Cha-cha) initiative, they would try to finish it before the May 2010 elections.

He told a news conference that preparations for next year's elections could upset the timetable of the House of Representatives for Cha-cha.

"Time may not be on our side, but certainly, we will give it our best shot," he said.

He denied reports that President Arroyo is behind the insistent move of her congressmen-allies to tinker with the Constitution.

"The Palace cannot dictate on the House. We are supporters and allies, not lapdogs and robots of the administration," he said.

### House debates on Cha-cha after Holy Week

Nograles said the House would open floor debates on Cha-cha upon the resumption of session on April 13.

He said the first Cha-cha measure that would be tackled would be his Resolution 737, which seeks to relax the constitutional re-

striction on foreign ownership of land and certain businesses.

Nograles added that with the consent of Camarines Sur Rep. Luis Villafuerte, he would file the resolution that seeks to convert Congress into a constituent assembly (con-ass) to do Cha-cha.

He announced that 175 House members have signed the resolution, 22 short of Villafuerte's target of 197 signatures to bypass the Senate on Cha-cha.

Responding to questions, Nograles said at some point in the floor debates on Cha-cha, Resolution 737 and the Villafuerte con-ass measure would be taken up together.

He said it is possible that his proposed amendment might be approved by a vote of 197 or 198, the figure Kampi leaders have been trying to attain to bypass the Senate.

Asked what happens if the House musters that vote for his resolution, the Speaker, quoting Majority Leader Arthur Defensor, said the measure would then be sent to the Senate for its own approval.

However, he said he would have to call a leaders' caucus when session resumes so they could decide what route his resolution would take – whether the legislative path as he and Defensor prefer, or con-ass without the Senate route.

He pointed out that although he and Defensor are advocating the legislative process route, the final decision rests with the majority of House members.

Nograles welcomed the statement of Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile that he (Enrile) would challenge before the Supreme Court any House decision to go it alone on Cha-cha.

"At some point, this issue will really have to be resolved by the Supreme Court," he said.

Enrile earlier said the Senate would bring the Charter change



Comelec Chairman Jose Melo

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