

Only Smartmatic meets requirements—Comelec

by SHEILA CRISOSTOMO
Philstar.com

THE consortium of Smartmatic and Total Information Management Corp. is so far the only bidder that has met the requirements set by the Commission on Elections-Special Bids and Awards Committee (Comelec-SBAC) for the P11.3-billion automation contract.

The Comelec-SBAC named the consortium as the bidder "with the single complying calculated bid."

But in Omnibus SBAC Resolution No. 09-002, the committee said the decision is "without prejudice to the motion that AMA Group of Companies and Election System and Software will file."

SBAC had directed the representatives of Smartmatic group to prepare their precinct count optical scan (PCOS) machines for demonstration starting May 27.

Smartmatic was the first to hurdle the eligibility, technical and financial screenings but it could not start demonstrating its machines because of the string of motions filed by its competitors.

Smartmatic's bid for the automation project is P7.2 billion.

"We therefore order that Smartmatic undergo post-qualification proceedings immediately and that its machines be forthwith tested to determine compliance with the criteria set for one worthy of this historic leap in Philippine elections," the resolution stated.

Last May 25, AMA was disqualified by SBAC for failing to submit system design specification and training manual. But the bidder had immediately manifested its intention to file a motion for reconsideration and thus, the SBAC "will admit its motion and rule according to its merits."

Under the same resolution



Representatives of Smartmatic test sample machines that will be used in the 2010 automated elections at the Comelec office last May 26. Philstar.com Photo by Edd Gumban

No. 09-002, SBAC had denied the request for clarification/reconsideration filed by Sequoia Voting Systems and Universal Storefront Services and the request to re-open all bid boxes filed by the joint venture of Gilat and F.F. Cruz and Co. Inc.

The consortium of Sequoia was earlier disqualified for not submitting various technical and financial documents.

SBAC had originally planned to allow the demonstration to begin only after it had ruled on all the pleadings and determined which among the bidders has the "lowest calculated bid."

According to SBAC head Ferdinand Rafanan, they decided to allow the demonstration today to speed up the bidding process.

Rafanan invited Sen. Francis Escudero and Makati Rep. Teddyboy Locsin, chairmen of the Senate and House committees on electoral reforms, respectively, to witness today's demonstration.

"As you have observed, we have been delayed for two weeks and for what? The rights of AMA are protected because we will admit their motion... We will rule

on the motion according to (its) merits," he said in an interview.

The target of SBAC was to award the automation contract on May 21, but this has been moved to middle of June.

Rafanan noted that the demonstration would be the last stage of the bidding process, "after which we shall be recommending to the Comelec en banc the winning bidder."

SBAC had listed 26 criteria that PCOS machines must hurdle and pass.

"The machines should be 99.995 (percent) accurate which means that for 20,000 vote marks, it should commit only one error or less. More errors than that, the machines will fail," he added.

During the demonstration, fake ballots will be fed into the machines to determine if they can be detected.

"The genuine ballots that have already been counted should also be recognized by the machines. The machines should not count them again. So we'll feed the counted ballots in the machine," he said.

The machines will also be tested for 12 hours straight on batteries to check their power

reserves.

"It should be able to transmit the results electronically. If they cannot, they fail. Electronically—meaning without physically handling the results and bringing them to the municipal board of canvassers or the national level or the central server in Manila... Just like the way your cellular phone brings the text messages to your friend," Rafanan added.

'Prepare quick transition to Plan B for 2010 polls'

Meanwhile, Escudero said yesterday the Comelec should prepare a quick transition to its alternative plan for the 2010 polls after it failed to meet its self-imposed deadline on the awarding of the P11.3-billion automation project.

"The Comelec is clearly now in denial. I implore them to come to their senses now and prepare their Plan B," he said in a statement.

"I fear what else their ad hoc ways may bring. Before it's too late, I hope they will have the courage to admit that a full implementation of poll automation is not possible at this time," said Escudero, who co-chairs the congressional oversight committee on poll automation.

He said it was not right for the Comelec to blame the delay on the bidders, which only goes to show that the poll body has failed

to do its homework.

"Now (Comelec) Chairman Melo could be having nightmares, and rightfully so, because what is at stake is the fate of our democracy," he added.

The Center for People Empowerment in Governance (CenPeg,) a public policy organization that promotes people empowerment in governance,

was also not impressed with the Comelec's failure to meet its timeline for automation.

CenPeg director Bobby Tuazon said in a forum organized by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) that Comelec should have done a wider consultation on what system should be used in automating next year's polls. ■



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Decision time for Lim over oil depot

MAYOR Alfredo Lim has to approve or veto the proposed Ordinance 7177 seeking to rezone a property in Pandacan, and keep the oil depot of three big oil firms in the city.

After hearing Cabinet men and foreign traders argue in favor of the oil depot last May 26, Lim conceded that it has become easier for him to decide whether or not to approve the controversial ordinance.

Lim held a dialogue with Cabinet men, officials of foreign chambers of commerce and other stakeholders on the resolution inside Petron's terminal in Pandacan, Manila, but chose to keep his cards close to his chest until May 27.

"We exchanged views and it has become

clearer on what should be done, and that is what we're going to do," he told reporters after the briefing.

Lim, however, said the stakeholders offered "different" views, and hence, did not reach a consensus.

"As of now, leading to nowhere," he said when asked which direction the opinions of the Cabinet were leaning to. "We have to weigh everything although they have very good suggestions and opinions. We have to consider all of them."

In addition to Cabinet officials, the dialogue was also attended by officials from the European Chambers of Commerce headed by Peter Wallace as well as executives from the oil companies. (Inquirer.net)

ENVOY SAYS

Taiwan recovering from decline, rehiring OFWs

by GABRIEL CARDINOZA, YOLANDA SOTELO
Inquirer.net

ISON, Pangasinan—Overseas Filipino workers who came home after being laid off from various factories in Taiwan have returned to work there, the chief of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (Teco) said here last May 26.

Donald C.T. Lee, Taiwan's representative to the Philippines and Teco chief, said some 5,000 OFWs were sent home in January after the global financial crisis forced Taiwanese businessmen to retrench their workers.

But Lee told reporters here, "Our economic recovery is quite fast. That's the reason why OFWs who were laid off have gone back [to Taiwan]."

Lee was in this eastern Pangasinan town on Tuesday afternoon as guest in the graduation ceremony for Van Aralan (Education on Wheels), an informal computer training program of the Ai Hu Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educate out-of-school youth and adults.

Lee said that as of last month, some 1,500 laid off workers have been called back to work by their employers and by the end of August, all of the OFWs who have been laid off would have gone back to his country.

"We need more workers, especially from your country because OFWs in Taiwan are hardworking. Most of our

electronics companies like to hire Filipinos than workers from other countries," Lee said.

At least 85,000 OFWs now work in Taiwan, he said, making them the third largest group of foreign workers in that country. Indonesians are the largest group, followed by Thais, Lee said.

Aside from being hardworking, Lee said Taiwanese businessmen prefer to hire Filipinos because they can speak English.

Lee also said, so far, no OFW in his country has been reported to have contracted the dreaded Influenza A/H1N1 virus.

"If any OFW gets the virus, I'm sure I will be immediately informed by my headquarters," he said. ■

House starts debate on Right of Reply Bill

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for the reply "as far as practicable and respecting the editorial judgment and availability of space or airtime, especially in regard to demands for the right of reply made by more than one person in relation to the same material or the reply shall be published in a space provided for reactions and reply."

It said the reply shall be published or broadcast not later than three days after the reply is received by the editorial office of a daily publication or station "provided that the reply is delivered within seven days from publication or airing of the mate-

rial replied to, otherwise, the right shall be waived."

For publications or radio and television outfits which print and broadcast daily, the reply shall be published or aired "in the next succeeding print publication or radio broadcast of the concerned subject to the same prescriptive period of seven days, otherwise the right shall be waived."

The measure said the length of the reply shall not be longer than the accusation or criticism as published or broadcast "and shall be subject to editorial discretion, such as malicious or libelous statements: provided that the full

gist of the reply is intact."

It provides that the aggrieved parties will be the ones to pay for the space of their reply or correction.

On the limitations of the right, the measure said any subsequent publication or broadcast in response to the reply "shall not be subject to another reply, except if new points are raised or new information or data are provided."

The bill seeks to create a congressional oversight committee on the right to reply "to oversee and monitor the implementation of this act for a period of five years." ■

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