

DATELINE PHILIPPINES

Comelec starts bidding for poll automation machines

by SHEILA CRISOSTOMO
Philstar.com

THE Commission on Elections' Special Bids and Awards Committee (Comelec-SBAC) began opening bid offers last May 4 for the P11.3-billion contract for automation machines to be used in the 2010 polls.

SBAC chairman and Comelec's Law Department director Ferdinand Rafanan said only seven of the 10 parties that initially showed interest to bid submitted offers.

These were the consortiums of Avante International of the United States, Canon Marketing Philippines of Japan and Netnode Technologies, DB Vizards and Creative Points of the Philippines; Indira Sistemas of Spain, Strategic Alliance Holdings Inc. of Philippines and Hart Intercivic of USA; Universal Storefront Services of Philippines and Sequoia Voting Systems of USA; Technology Management Inc. of Philippines and Smartmatic of the Netherlands; Amalgated Metro Philippines and Syrex Inc., both of Philippines and Anishin Inc. of Taiwan; AMA Group of Companies of Philippines and Election System and Software of USA; and Gilat of Israel and F.F. Cruz and Co. Inc. of Philippines.

But Avante's group was disqualified for failing to submit the last two pages of its proposed contract and certificate of acceptance.

The group is expected to submit a motion for reconsideration.

The SBAC will know on May 7 which of the consortiums offered the lowest calculated bid.

Rafanan, however, noted that this is not an assurance that the "lowest bidder" would be the one to bag the contract.

"He is not the winner yet. He will be subjected to post qualification. And that post

qualification will verify the documents. Are the contents true? Are they accurate? Are they duly executed?"

The automation machines of the lowest bidder will also be tested by the SBAC.

"When our criteria have been complied with, then we can say that the lowest calculated bid is the lowest calculated responsive bid," he said.

Last May 4, the SBAC screened the bidders to see if they submitted "eligibility requirements" such as business permit, quarterly value added tax return, contract to publish bid proposal, and income tax return.

After this, the SBAC will check the bidders' technical and financial offers. The committee is expected to complete the procedure on May 7 and sign the contract with the winning bidder on May 23.

On the allegation of former Akbayan party-list representative Loretta Rosales that some of the bidders have "bad records" in other countries, Rafanan claimed they could not just believe "mere news reports."

"It's in the newspapers. They have to prove it," he added.

Rosales cited Sequoia Voting Systems and Electronic Systems and Software for allegedly being investigated and fined by the

US "for failure of their voting machines," while Smartmatic Corp. had been accused of having ties with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, a strong critic of the US government.

Smartmatic had reportedly been chosen by the Chavez-led Venezuelan government to supply the voting machines during a recall election in 2004, although it was only the first time the firm provided machines for an election.

The company reportedly tied up with Venezuelan software firm Bitza, which was then 28 percent owned by Chavez's government.

Meantime, Ombudsman

Merceditas Gutierrez has ordered the creation of a special unit to monitor the procurement of ballot counting machines and other election equipment that will eventually be used for the full automation of the 2010 national polls.

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