

# Only Smartmatic meets requirements—Comelec

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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.

Last Monday, 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 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 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.

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," 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," Rafanan added.

**'Prepare quick transition to Plan B for 2010 polls'**

Meanwhile, Escudero said last May 26 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.



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

"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.

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 fail-

ure to meet its time line for automation.

CenPeg director Bobby Tuzon 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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