

Bid for undersea cable in limbo

ABDULLAH MAMUN

The government bid to install the second undersea cable is now caught in limbo as the ministry and regulator concerned are gripped by indecision over the fate of a lone proposal submitted against the bidding for the job.

A consortium of five local telecom companies participated in the bidding in May this year after the government's first attempt in March failed to gather any offer.

The consortium of Mir Holdings, BanglaTrac Communication, HRC Technologies, Advanced Data Networks Systems and Agni Systems offered to install the submarine cable at \$70 million.

But the regulator is yet to decide on the proposal, saying it could not make a comparative evaluation of the proposal as there were no other bidders.

However, the advertisement published earlier did not mention that only one offer is unacceptable, a ministry official said.

Recently a committee of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) evaluated the offer of the consortium but did not recommend whether the proposal will qualify or not. But the committee identified some problems in the proposal.

However, the telecom ministry asked the regulator to reassess the proposal, said the official of the ministry, which is the licensing authority for the submarine cable.

M Rafiqul Islam, additional secretary of the telecom ministry, said: "Public procurement rules don't say that a bidding should be cancelled if it fails to draw more than one proposal."

If the company can comply with the requirements of the government, then it can get the job, he said.

Telecom analysts said bidding for a submarine cable on a build-operate-maintain basis is not public procurement, rather it is giving a licence for providing services.

Md A Salam, managing director of Agni System, a member company of the consortium, said: "This is not a competitive bidding. So the government can give a licence to another company afterwards."

The proposed submarine cable would connect Bangladesh with the rest of the world through the Bay of Bengal.

The government decided a few years ago to link the country with a second undersea cable to overcome the disturbance resulted from frequent submarine cable cuts and reduce dependence on a lone cable.

The telecom regulator then took a move to connect Bangladesh with two more submarine cables through private sector initiative as internet-based services are often disrupted with the lone undersea cable.

Bangladesh was linked with the first submarine cable in 2006.

The government will also issue six licences for setting up international terrestrial cables connecting the country with the world via India.

Income tax fair kicks off on cheery note

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The tax official took a moment to find out the tax zone for the prospective taxpayer, Salma Begum, a resident from Haricharan Roy Road in Old Dhaka.

The official typed the address on computer, marked the tax zone and got a printout containing the name of Salma, address of the tax office, tax circle, zone and other information.

Salma took the printed copy and headed for stalls that provide tax identification number (TIN).

That was a scene at the Income Tax Fair that began yesterday at Officers' Club in Dhaka where many prospective and present taxpayers gathered either to get TINs, submit tax return forms or to seek help to clear confusion about forms and paying tax.

For the second time, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) has organised 'Income Tax Fair' across the country to create awareness and motivate people to pay tax to boost revenue receipts.

In Bangladesh, only 9 lakh of 15 crore population now pay tax.

Last year, the tax authority organised the fair only in Dhaka and Chittagong.

This year, the fair is being held in all divisional cities thanks to the huge response that the NBR received in the maiden fair where thousands of prospective taxpayers got TINs instantly.

Last year, some 52,440 tax returns were submitted, helping the collector log Tk 113 crore in income tax.

The tax administrator expects to receive 100,000 visitors and log Tk 300 crore in income tax this year.

At the fair, the tax administrator offers services such as issuance of TINs on the spot and helping taxpayers fill in tax return forms and paying taxes.

"It's a nice experience. I have got my TIN without spending a single penny," said Toufique Mahmud, who works for a garment buying house, Inditex.

"Today the service I have got is differ-

ent from what we usually get from government offices," said Mahmud who had contacted a tax lawyer to get a TIN.

The lawyer demanded Tk 2,500 for getting the job done. "The fair has saved me the money," he said.

The fair, which remains open from 10am to 6pm until September 22, also has separate booths for women, aged and disabled people.

Ibrar Alam, who teaches human resources management at a private university, said he came to the fair to collect a tax return form.

"If you go to a tax office, you will hear excuses from officials. I am not facing those problems here," he said.

Alam, however, said the tax returns forms should be made easier and words should be easily understandable so that anyone can fill in the forms without others' assistance.

"The form is too long and full of many unfamiliar words (in Bangla) that cannot be understood easily," said AJM Naushad Khan, a banker.

"The forms should be made user friendly," said Khan who came to the fair along with his friends.

"I like the fair. I will submit my returns every year at the event. But it will be wonderful if the authority issues tax certificate instead of acknowledge receipts."

Like Khan, Anisuzzaman Sarker has also come to the fair to submit tax returns. In the past, he depended on tax lawyer. The fair has given him the scope to learn about the process of submission of returns by himself.

"It's a good initiative. Now I am clear on how to prepare wealth statement and show expenses in the tax returns by myself," said Md Zakir Azam, who works for Dhaka Medical College.

NOTICE

We bring out today four pages instead of our

Citi honours small business

Three microentrepreneurs and one lender get awards

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Citibank NA Bangladesh yesterday honoured three individuals and one institution in recognition of their efforts to start from the scratch and change their lives and the people around them through creativity and job creation.

Tajnahar Begum from Dhaka received the 'Best Microentrepreneur of the Year' award as she almost single handedly started a tyre repairing shop and gave it a strong foundation within a decade.

Mirza Morsheda Akhter from Tangail was named the 'Best Woman Microentrepreneur of the Year'. She set up a mushroom farm that gives both her and her employees a decent living.

Md Answer Ali from Bogra won the 'Best Microentrepreneur of the Year in Agriculture' award after he changed his fortune by cultivating 20 types of largely foreign vegetable.

The Jagorani Chakra Foundation received award in the 'Best Microfinance Institution' category. The non-government financial institution has changed lives of hundreds of thousands in about 20 districts through microfinance programmes.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith and Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman handed the awards among the winners at a ceremony at Ruposhi Bangla hotel in the city.

In addition to the award plaque, each winner received prize money worth Tk 350,000 each and a certificate.

Funded by Citi Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Citigroup, and jointly managed by Citibank NA and the Credit and Development Forum (CDF), the Citi Microentrepreneurship Awards is designed to recognise individuals and microfinance institutions.



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Standing from left, Tajnahar Begum, Mirza Morsheda Akhter, Md Answer Ali and Azadul Kabir Arzoo pose with crests after receiving Citi's Microentrepreneurship awards at a ceremony at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in Dhaka yesterday. Seated from left, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh President Parveen Mahmud, Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman and Citi Country Officer Rashed Maqsood are also seen.

Speaking as the chief guest, Muhith said, apart from recognising their skills, the entrepreneurs should also be honoured.

"They (NGOs) are contributing to the development of the country through innovation and creativity," he said, lauding the role of the NGOs.

The BB governor said the effort of microfinance institutions is noteworthy as they are helping create self-employment, particularly in the rural areas.

He said the central bank has taken various steps to increase credit flow to agriculture, small and medium enterprises and environment-friendly projects, which aim at supporting the country's small farmers, sharecroppers, small businessmen, microentrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs and the society's disadvantaged group.

"These activities supplement the government's effort to ensure inclusive growth. It is a good sign that the microcredit organisations have joined our effort."

The governor also said the government would not be able to alleviate poverty alone. "It's possible to make the country poverty-free with the help of the private sector."

Parveen Mahmud, president of Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh, said the microcredit operations have created many entrepreneurs in the country.

"As a result, the sector has become bigger and thousands of people are working at the grassroot level. The government should maintain this conducive environment," she said.

Citi Country Officer Rashed Maqsood and CDF Executive Director Md Abdul Awal also spoke.

Citi, the leading global financial services company, has established a strong presence in Bangladesh. It now has four branches, four service outlets and employs over 180 people in the country.

Leading dailies The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo and private television station Channel i were the media partners of the annual award now in its sixth year.

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