

CPIB to look into NParks bike purchase

AMIR HUSSAIN
amirhussain@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE – The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) has been roped in to look into the National Parks Board's purchase of 26 foldable Brompton bicycles.

Yesterday, the Ministry of National Development (MND) confirmed — in response to media queries — that it has reported the matter to the CPIB.

This, as the Ministry of Finance (MOF) told TODAY that in future instances when a tender or a quotation receives just one bid, public officers will be required “to justify why they consider the single bid competitive or reflective of fair market value”. For example, they may have performed independent checks or consulted experienced buyers, an MOF spokesperson said.

Adding that such a move would “add further rigour to the process where a single bid is received”, the spokesperson said: “If no reasonable bids have been received, agencies may call for a fresh quotation/tender, having revised their requirements if deemed necessary.”

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

● CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The new requirement comes in the wake of the latest procurement lapse in the Civil Service: On Tuesday, the MND said that the NParks officer in charge of the purchase of the bicycles — which cost S\$2,200 each — had been suspended following an internal audit ordered by National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan.

The suspended officer is Mr Bernard Lim, an assistant director of the Park Connector Network.

The MND had said that the internal audit had “uncovered some discrepancies which, although inconclusive by themselves, suggested the possibility of bias in the procurement”.

It had also reportedly established that Mr Lim, a biking enthusiast, had links on Facebook to the owners of BikeHop, the company which won the tender.

However, it also noted that his Facebook account had other bike suppliers and vendors as “friends” as well.

The NParks call for a quotation was published on government procurement portal GeBIZ on Jan 25. The invitation closed on Jan 30, with BikeHop as the only bidder.

The incident has raised several questions among observers about the Government's procurement process: What are the safeguards against abuse of the system, particularly when only one bid is received? Should the minimum duration for the publicity of tenders be longer? Should it be extended when there is just a single bid? Is the publicity for tenders adequate?

Under the MOF's current guidelines, in general, quotations must be open for at least four working days, while tenders must be open for at least 14 calendar days (25 calendar days for tenders subject to interna-

tional trade agreements).

Ang Mo Kio Group Representation Constituency Member of Parliament Inderjit Singh, who sits on the Government Parliamentary Committee (GPC) for Finance, reiterated that there “must be some reasonable amount of time for enough companies to participate”.

Singapore Management University Associate Professor Leong Kwong Sin added: “If you want to tender for a complicated thing, then your period (should be) reasonably longer”.

He also felt that Government agencies should also exercise “due diligence” and find out the number of suitable vendors available, which would help to ascertain market prices.

National University of Singapore Associate Professor Mak Yuen Teen concurred that the tender period for an item should depend “on the sophistication and the quantum involved”.

While MPs and corporate governance experts TODAY spoke to generally felt that the existing platform, GeBIZ, was adequate, Chua Chu Kang GRC MP Zaqy Mohamad said that the portal could be made “a bit more intuitive and transparent” so that tenders can be more easily searched.

The MOF spokesperson reiterated that the calling of tenders and quotations “openly through GeBIZ ensures fairness and transparency in the procurement process”.

She added: “As an Internet platform, GeBIZ has wider outreach and also enables suppliers to view the opportunity throughout the tender or quotation opening period.”

According to the spokesperson, government agencies may alert suppliers to opportunities that are published openly in GeBIZ via the portal's alert services or an agency's website, as well as other channels.

“This is to ensure that the procurement opportunity receives sufficient attention, while ensuring that procurement is still done in a transparent manner via GeBIZ,” she added.

14

CALENDAR
DAYS:
THE DURATION
A TENDER
MUST BE OPEN
FOR: 25 DAYS
FOR TENDERS
INVOLVING IN-
TERNATIONAL
TRADE