

FRANKLY Speaking

Why the tepid response? | Was it for real? | A lethal combination

Why the tepid response?

The Sungai Buloh-Kajang mass rapid transit (MRT) project is easily one of the biggest in Southeast Asia.

For a job of such size, the response from contractors has been tepid, to say the least. A clear example is the contract to supply the trains for the Sungai Buloh-Kajang line, which has received a lukewarm response despite MRT Corp extending the deadline.

Some of the bidders sought additional time to put in their proposals but at the end of it, there were only three — two from China and the third being Siemens SMH Rail Construction.

Interestingly, a week before the tender closed, MRT Corp went public with its evaluation criteria — an unprecedented step. MRT Corp said the information was released to enhance transparency in relation to the contract, which it claimed had attracted much interest.

But the higher disclosure did not change the level of response to the tender.

Such big tenders normally attract no less than five bidders from the international field. That was conspicuously missing in this case.

Why didn't the big boys put in their bids? Were they not comfortable with the terms? Or were they not convinced that their bid would get fair consideration?

It is not just the supply of trains that has seen poor response. Other tenders related to the MRT project are facing the same problem. For instance, the contract for the platform and screen doors has attracted only one bid, from a Singapore-based company.

Something is really wrong when, with no big projects elsewhere in this part of the world, a huge job is cold-shouldered.

MRT Corp is likely disappointed, but it must ask itself why the big boys are staying away. Perhaps, the bidders have to be convinced that their bids will receive fair consideration.