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**ISLAMABAD:** The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday issued a stay order against awarding a contract to a US firm for provision of lamination paper to the Department of Immigration and Passports for making machine-readable passports. Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddqui, after the preliminary hearing of the case, issued notices to the interior secretary, immigration and passports director general (DG), machine-readable passports project director and others and sought their comments in the next hearing on April 16.

The contract to the US company, Security Laminates Opsec, was challenged by the management of Reliance Company, a French firm, who argued that the contract was awarded in violation of Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) rules.

Reliance Company Chief Executive Officer Sameer Baig, through his counsel, Advocate Salman Akram Raja, contended in the petition that his client got the highest points for quality when its lamination paper was sent to a laboratory after the immigration department and the interior ministry sought bids for paper for passports through an advertisement. But later, the contract was awarded to the US company without informing his client.

Raja alleged that immigration and passports DG and project director for machine-readable passports manipulated the bidding process to favour the US company in clear violation of PPRA rules. He maintained that his client had submitted technical and financial proposals before the project director after fulfilling all requirements.

Currently, there was an acute shortage of lamination paper in the immigration department, the lawyer said. He alleged that the existing company was responsible for all the mess and requested the court to declare the contract illegal.

Courtesy: Tribune