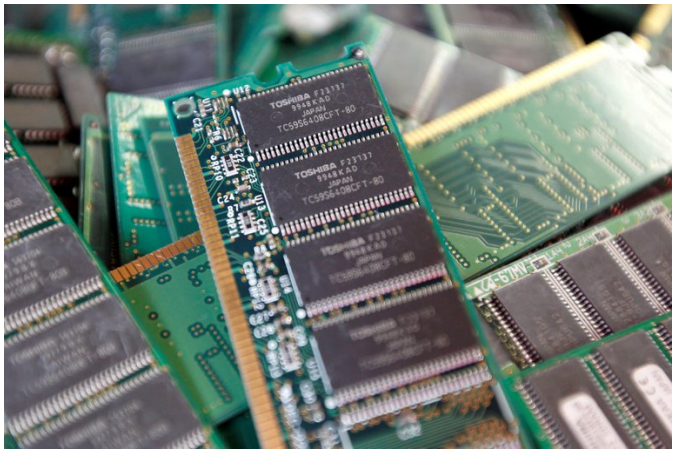
Toshiba appears to have decided on a buyer for its memory chip unit-- the consortium formed by Bain Capital and SK Hynix, together with some financial backing from Apple.



However, Reuters reports, Toshiba is still "not ruling out a deal with other bidders," making the lengthy process to sell the unit even more, well, lengthy. Reuters also says the decision to choose the Bain-led group comes after failure to bridge disagreements with the other main rival suitor, Western Digital.

“We are disappointed that Toshiba would take this action,” a WD statement reads. “Our goal has been — and remains — to reach a mutually beneficial outcome that satisfies the needs of Toshiba and its stakeholders.”

WD has complicated the sale of the deal, since it has a joint investment in a key Toshiba NAND production plant-- leading to a lawsuit from Toshiba over what it deems as interference.

Toshiba has to reach an agreement on the sale of the memory unit by the March 2018 end of the financial year if it wants the funds required to cover the billions in liabilities at its US nuclear unit, Westinghouse. This is what brought about the sale of the unit in the first place, since it otherwise it was a more than profitable part of the Japanese conglomerate.

Currently Toshiba has signed a memorandum of understanding with Bain to accelerate discussions, and hopes to reach an agreement by end September 2017. However the memorandum is not legally binding, and negotiations with other potential buyers can take place.

According to Reuters the latest offer from the Bain group stands 2.4 trillion yen ($22 billion), including a 200 billion yen infrastructure investment.

Bloomberg adds Apple contributes around $3bn to the Bain offer, a sum filling the gap left when Japanese government's Innovation Network and Development Bank of Japan pulled back from the Bain bid. The iPhone maker is also said to be helping swing the odds towards Bain's favour, since it wants a steady supply of Toshiba-made flash in order to be not so dependent on Samsung-made components.

So, who will be the buyer of the Toshiba memory unit? Ultimately, no one knows. The Japanese government is still urging Toshiba to go for a deal with WD, while there is no guarantee the company will go for the Bain deal. One also has to keep in mind Foxconn, who also wants to buy the unit, even if it has failed to reach a final bid as yet.

Go Toshiba to Focus on Chip Talks With Bain, But Doesn't Rule Out Other Suitors (Reuters)

Go Apple Discussing $3bn Stake in Bain's Toshiba Bid (Bloomberg)

Go Toshiba Sues WD Over Memory Business Sale Delays