



Jane's Defence Weekly

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Publication:

Jane's Defence Weekly 2012

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Section:

ASIA PACIFIC

Country:

Japan

Last posted:

2012-09-05

Prosecutors have searched the Japanese Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Kawasaki Heavy Industries (KHI) on suspicion of bid rigging related to the UH-X multipurpose helicopter programme, MoD officials said on 5 September.

The alleged bid rigging involved contracts for the development of the Kawasaki UH-X utility helicopter, a successor to the Bell/Fuji UH-1J now operated by the Japan Ground Self-Defence Force (JGSDF), a JGSDF official said.

Japanese media reported that officials from the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office searched the MoD's Technical Research and Development Institute (TRDI) and Equipment Procurement and Construction Office (EPCO) on 4 September. This was confirmed by Defence Minister Satoshi Morimoto on 5 September. "The ministry will co-operate in the investigation," he told reporters.

KHI announced in March this year that it would develop the UH-X helicopter after its proposal was chosen over that offered by Fuji Heavy Industries. A KHI spokesman confirmed to

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that prosecutors had searched company premises, and promised "full co-operation" with the investigation.

The MoD will spend JPY27.9 billion (USD355 million) on research and development of the UH-X helicopter, with plans to complete a prototype by fiscal year 2015 and the test flight by 2017. The MoD plans to purchase about 180 UH-X helicopters over the next 20 years at an estimated unit price of JPY1.2 billion.

## COMMENT

According to KHI, the UH-X will be derived from the OH-1 armed observation helicopter and have a maximum speed of more than 260 km/h and a range of more than 230 km. Its adoption is a vital part of MoD plans to defend remote islands in both the Okinawa island chain and East China Sea and to reinforce the GSDF's "Dynamic Defence Force" posture, which was outlined in the 2010 National Defence Programme Guidelines.

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