

Japan shelves plan to acquire tankers

PAUL LEWIS/SINGAPORE

JAPAN HAS TEMPORARILY dropped plans to acquire air-to-air refuelling tankers under its KC-X requirement. It has also trimmed back on its planned purchase of new Mitsubishi FS-X support fighters, as part of the Government's newly approved five-year defence programme.

The Japanese cabinet has passed a ¥25.15 trillion (\$250 billion) mid-term defence plan for 1996 to 2000. The five-year provision is ¥570 billion less than that originally proposed and will limit average annual growth in spending to 2.1%.

Japan's conservative Liberal Democratic Party, the largest member of the coalition Government, had been pressing for a ¥25.72 trillion budget, but has been forced to accept cuts by its left-wing and centrist partners.

The Social Democratic Party, in particular, had been opposed to the inclusion of tanker and long-range transports in the mid-term plan, as they might be considered to be offensive weapons. It had also sought cuts in the FS-X programme.

The Japan Air Self-Defence Force (JASDF) had been hoping to acquire an initial four KC-X tanker/transport. Aircraft under consideration included Boeing's proposed 767 tanker/transport multi-mis-

sion aircraft, the McDonnell Douglas KDC-10 and its C-17 transport aircraft.

A study into the JASDF's tanker/transport requirement will be made, and there is provision in the mid-term plan for revisions to be made in fiscal year 1998, providing the overall budget is not increased. The Government has set aside a ¥110 billion contingency fund for equipment procurement.

The coalition Government has agreed to reduce FS-X procurement, from 141 to the programme's original number of 130 aircraft. It also wants to shave ¥200 million from the aircraft's average unit fly-away cost of ¥8 billion.

Japan's Defence Agency had sought to hold down costs by boosting the number of two-seat TFS-X aircraft ordered. Plans now call for 83 single-seaters and 47 tandem-seat versions to be built. The reduction by 11 two-seaters will be made by scrapping plans to re-equip the JASDF's Blue Impulse aerobatic team and buying two fewer attrition aircraft.

Production of the FS-X over the next five years will total 47 aircraft, three fewer than planned. With approval to begin production of the first 11 fighters in 1996 — seven single-seaters and four tandem-seat trainers — the JDA has redesignated the aircraft the F-2. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ APACHE FUNDING SECURED

The US Army has awarded a \$279.6 million contract to McDonnell Douglas (MDC) covering the remanufacture of the first 18 AH-64D Longbow Apache attack helicopters. The contract paves the way for first deliveries to begin in March 1997, and marks the start of negotiations with the US Army for a five-year agreement covering "at least" 232 AH-64Ds, according to MDC.

Sudan takes extra Chengdu F-7s

SUDAN HAS received an additional six Chengdu F-7s (MiG-21s) from China, with Middle Eastern intelligence sources claiming that Iran has financed the deal.

The air force of Sudan is playing a considerable operational role in the offensive against the rebels in the south of the country and it already operates nine F-7s. These are being used against rebel centres.

Iran so far has assisted Sudan mainly by shipping spares for Soviet-made weapon systems. □



Malaysia to use A-4s as tankers

THE MALAYSIAN AIR FORCE is retaining six of its elderly McDonnell Douglas A-4PTM Skyhawks for use as tankers. The Curtiss Wright J-65-V420 powered-aircraft are fitted with an underfuselage-mounted "buddy" hose-reel pod and are used to support Malaysia's probe-equipped BAe Hawk 200s. The A-4s have been replaced in front-line service by the Hawk, but are expected to remain in service as tankers until Airod completes conversion of two Lockheed Martin KC-130Hs.

RAAF lists three trainers

AUSTRALIA HAS shortlisted three bidders for the air force's lead-in fighter project (Air 5367). The three are Aermacchi, British Aerospace and McDonnell Douglas (MDC).

The shortlisted tenderers were announced on 15 December, 1995. Proposals for the request for tender (RFT) are due on 14 March. The three aircraft under consideration to replace the Royal Australian Air Force's (RAAF) ageing Macchi 326H are the Aermacchi MB 339FD, the BAe Hawk 100 and the MDC T45 Goshawk.

The RFT does not identify the number of aircraft to be acquired, but seeks offers based on specified use on defined tasks at two bases. Between 35 and 45 aircraft are likely to be required.

Aircraft already ruled out include the AMX International AMX-T, the Aero Vodochody L-59F and the Dassault Dornier Alpha Jet.

Attributes sought include a training capability for both Army ground support and Naval fleet support, although it is probable that only a limited number would be provided with the latter.

Tenderers' proposals will be based in effect on manufacturers'

guarantees of a minimum level of on-line availability for various tasks at specified rates of usage, supported by fatigue and other engineering data.

The RFT also requires manufacturers to provide all overhaul, engineering and maintenance other than operational turnaround maintenance over a 25-year service life.

Aircraft will be fitted with training weapons, including cannon of unspecified calibre, and to be capable of being armed with bombs up to the Mk82 series, including laser-guided weapons and high- and low-drag stores.

The carriage of air-to-air missiles is also required, with full functionality desirable. Hands-on stick and throttle controls are specified, along with head-up displays in the front cockpit, with similar equipment in the rear cockpit, and continuous computed release and impact-point capability.

Range and endurance specifications call for an unrefuelled still air-ferry range of at least 1,650km (900nm), with 15min reserve fuel.

The service has a firm requirement for the first 12 aircraft to be in service in mid-1999 for instructor training before the type becomes fully operational. □