

Japan tech firm Fujitsu in firing line over UK Post Office scandal

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Japanese tech firm Fujitsu's UK arm has lucrative contracts with the British government.

A Japanese technology giant is in the crosshairs of British lawmakers for building the faulty accounting software that led to what has been called

the country's biggest ever miscarriage of justice.

Fujitsu created the Horizon IT system that resulted in some 700 local [post office](#) managers being wrongly convicted for theft and false accounting between 1999 and 2005.

The UK government, which plans to exonerate all victims, has warned the company will be "held to account" if a public inquiry finds it guilty of wrongdoing.

MPs are calling for billions of dollars of government contracts with Fujitsu to be re-examined amid public outrage over the scandal, ignited by a hit TV drama aired last week.

Lawmakers are due to grill Fujitsu bosses next week when they are hauled in front of the UK parliament select committee that scrutinizes the spending of the government's business department.

"We're determined to uncover whether Fujitsu put profit before people," the business committee's chair, Labour MP Liam Byrne, told AFP.

"Someone must have known things were not right while innocent lives were being ruined by evidence that was simply unsafe.

"So we've got to know who at Fujitsu knew what when, and crucially did they raise warnings, or keep the truth to themselves," he added.

A spokesperson for Fujitsu told AFP the company is "fully committed to supporting the inquiry in order to understand what happened and to learn from it".

They added that Fujitsu "has apologized for its role" in the subpostmasters' suffering.

Lives lost

The state-owned Post Office began installing Horizon IT in the late 1990s but flaws in its programming showed that money had gone missing from the subpostmasters' branch accounts when it had not.

Postal service executives, refusing to acknowledge problems with the software, forced workers to repay the shortfalls.

The false accusations resulted in some managers being jailed, going bankrupt, losing their homes and their health.

Four people took their own lives and dozens of those since exonerated died without seeing their names cleared.

The High Court of England and Wales in 2019 ruled that it had been computer errors, not criminality, that had been behind the missing money.



The firm created faulty accounting software that saw subpostmasters wrongly convicted of theft.

The UK government announced Wednesday that it would unilaterally quash all convictions and offer £600,000 (\$764,000) per head in upfront compensation.

The government has already in recent years paid almost £150 million to over 2,500 total victims embroiled in the scandal.

An independent public inquiry established in 2021 has yet to conclude who at the Post Office, or Fujitsu, knew what and when.

Government ministers have suggested that Fujitsu should cover some of

the payouts if it is found culpable.

Other contracts

"We strongly believe that individuals, that businesses, will be held to account for one of the biggest miscarriages of justice this country has ever seen," Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesman said Wednesday.

"We will not resile from that. But it is right that we allow an independent inquiry to get the facts, to set them out, and then we can act," he added.

Fujitsu—which has headquarters in Tokyo—is one of the world's largest IT services providers, with annual revenues of around \$27 billion.

It provides IT services to multiple UK government departments including the interior, foreign, and environment ministries.

The firm has won 197 contracts from the British government since 2012, worth a total of \$6.8 billion, according to data compiled by analysts at Tussell, which tracks government spending.

That includes the nearly £2.4 billion contract for the Horizon system itself, plus several agreements worth a combined £1 billion with the revenues and customs department.

Fujitsu also has a dozen contracts with the Ministry of Defence worth \$582 million, according to Tussell.

The IT company received its most recent [contract](#) from the UK government as recently as last month, the Tussell data shows.

Conservative MP Mark Francois told parliament the [government](#) should review all of its contracts with Fujitsu and "should consider suspending"

them if the company "won't do the right thing".

"Those are conversations we should have when we've identified exactly who is responsible," said business minister Kevin Hollinrake in reply.

"We won't be able to do that for some months yet but we're keen to do it as soon as we possibly can."

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