

Cambodian UN force biggest in decades?

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations yesterday proposed sending 15,900 troops and about 1,500 civilians to Cambodia in the largest peace-keeping operation in decades, diplomats said.

A draft report prepared by the new head of UN operations in Cambodia, Yashushi Akashi, gave no cost estimates but the size of the proposed operation should cost close to \$US2 billion (\$A2.67 billion), according to those who received the document.

The Cambodia operation is the most ambitious ever planned by the United Nations and, if carried out in full, would be biggest since troops were sent to the Congo in the 1960s.

The report said 10,200 infantry were needed to patrol the countryside and demobilise and supervise combatants in designated areas.

In addition, it called for a 2,000-member engineering unit, a logistics battalion and a medical team.

Whether or not the initial plan will be carried out in full is not certain. But both the Security Council and the United Nations hope for at least 5,000 troops in Cambodia before May when the rainy season begins.

The plan is to be implemented in stages to deter-

mine if the full complement of UN forces are needed.

Money will be a problem, with both Japan and Germany being asked to contribute a substantial amount and the United States expected to pay about 30 percent of the total cost.

"We want to see flexibility to call a halt to the phases at certain stages if it seems we have enough people there," said one Security Council envoy.

Under an agreement signed between four warring Cambodian factions last October, the United Nations is to supervise cantonments where combatants can be disarmed, verify a fragile ceasefire now in effect and help administer the country until free elections can be held.

A senior UN envoy will also work closely with a Supreme National Council, headed by Prince Norodom Sihanouk. This comprises members of Cambodia's three guerilla factions, and the Phnom

Penh government they fought for 13 years.

Militarily strongest of the guerillas are the Khmer Rouge, held responsible for the deaths of more than one million Cambodians when they came to power in the mid-1970s. They were dislodged by Vietnam in 1979.

The United Nations has been under pressure from the five permanent Security Council members -- the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China -- for months to produce the report. The five negotiated the agreement over two years.

Diplomats said council members feared a deteriorating law and order situation, particularly in Phnom Penh. They were also disturbed at reports that some combatants, many of them Khmer Rouge members, had fled to the hills with their weapons.

"They have become bandits and have to be dealt with by UN forces even if they are not part of the cantonment regroupment," the envoy said.