

PHILIPPINE SENATE APPEARS TO SOFTEN STAND ON NUCLEAR BILL.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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MANILA, May 12, Reuter - The Philippine Senate is apparently softening its stand on a tough anti-nuclear bill, with some legislators saying on Thursday they back amendments that would tone down the measure.

The "Freedom from Nuclear Weapons Bill" aims to ban port calls by nuclear-powered ships, overflights or landings by aircraft carrying nuclear warheads and the storage of nuclear weapons.

Passage of the bill would bring Manila into confrontation with Washington, its major ally, over a U.S. policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons or nuclear power-plants on its aircraft, ships or bases.

Manila and Washington are currently holding talks on the future of two U.S. military bases in the Philippines. A treaty governing the installations expires in 1991.

Several senators, who did not want to be identified, told reporters they had proposed a formula that would allow port calls and berthings by nuclear-powered or armed ships but would ban the storage of nuclear weapons.

President Corazon Aquino was quoted as urging leading senators on Monday to "help me keep my options open", a remark interpreted as meaning the bill might restrict her in negotiations over the bases.

Senator Wigberto Tanada, the bill's sponsor, said he would resist attempts to soften the bill.

Another backer, Senator Aquilino Pimentel, said: "We will oppose the amendments. I am optimistic that we have the backing of the majority."

Other senators said the amendments would be taken up in a closed-door caucus next week before the start of debates on the bill.

Meanwhile, anti-government demonstrators dispersed peacefully before dawn on Thursday after an all-night rally near the presidential palace to back demands for the return of former president Ferdinand Marcos from exile in Hawaii.

The rally followed a protest march through Manila on Wednesday, one of the biggest shows of strength by Marcos supporters since he was overthrown in 1986.

Aquino told reporters she stood by a decision not to let Marcos return for the funeral of his mother, who died on May 4 in a Manila hospital.

"Well, I have already said that we will not allow Marcos to come home," Aquino told reporters. "I think he himself does not want to come home after all."

Marcos's relatives have yet to announce a date for the funeral, but Aquino has said she may permit Marcos's children to return if they formally apply for permission.

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