

MANILA'S DEBATED LAND REFORM PLEDGED 66 MLN DLRS.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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MANILA, April 26, Reuter - The Philippines has received pledges of aid totalling 66 million dollars from the United States, the Netherlands and Italy to support its ambitious land reform program, Agrarian Reform Secretary Philip Juico told Reuters.

The broad outline of the program was set by President Corazon Aquino last July. Passage of the law, which aims to redistribute 5.6 million hectares of farmland, including sugar, coconut and banana plantations, has been mired in debate.

Juico said the U.S. had pledged 50 million dollars, the Dutch 10 million dollars, and the Italians six million dollars for the program.

Juico said in an interview that Japan was likely to provide about 395 million dollars in additional aid, forming the bulk of the 15th yen loan package currently being negotiated with Japan's Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund.

The 14th package, finalised last December, totalled 80.2 billion yen.

Assistant Agrarian Reform Secretary Dorothy Tadeo said a group of aid donors led by the World Bank and Japan would meet in Manila in July to discuss additional financing for the plan, which aims to help an estimated 2.7 million landless peasants.

Aquino left it to Congress to determine the land ceiling and the manner in which dispossessed landlords were to be compensated.

The Senate is on the verge of approving a bill allowing landholding families to keep five hectares of their plantations. The House of Representatives, dominated by landlords, wants owners to keep seven hectares.

"It's very difficult to say what is emerging right now because the two versions are poles apart in certain respects," Juico said.

Juico said the government was pressing ahead with the redistribution of 727,800 hectares of rice and corn land. The government distributed 80,140 hectares last year, Juico said.

Last Thursday about 15,000 protesters marched on Manila urging Aquino to speed up land reform.

On Sunday, Vice-President Salvador Laurel, one of Aquino's major opponents, called on about 1,500 protesting landowners to resist the breakup of their estates.

Juico, who was shouted down when he tried to explain the reforms, said, "I hope it doesn't reach the point where there'll be street fighting and people will get killed."

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