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## **Kaczynski aims to tap rural vote in Poland**

By Judy Dempsey

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BERLIN: In what is already becoming a bitter election campaign, Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski of Poland plans to make the fight against corruption one of the main issues when voters go to the polls Oct. 21, party officials said Sunday.

Kaczynski, a conservative who won enough votes from legislators Friday to dissolve Parliament and hold elections two years ahead of schedule, set out on the campaign trail for his Law and Justice party over the weekend to woo the conservative and Catholic rural population.

The Polish countryside voted in the 2005 election for either the populist and Euro-skeptic party of Self Defense or for the Polish Peasant Party. Self Defense won 11.4 percent of the overall vote in 2005 and the Polish Peasant Party 7 percent.

Speaking to a congress of farmers in the southern Polish village of Wierzchoslawice, Kaczynski tried to win over these small communities by promising to combat corruption and defend their interests back in the capital, Warsaw.

"There will be no solidarity in Poland if the farming regions are not treated in a just way," Kaczynski said in a televised speech to the congress.

Amid rapturous applause, Kaczynski then began a fierce attack on Civic Platform, the largest of the opposition parties, which was narrowly defeated by Law and Justice in the 2005 election. Kaczynski accused the pro-business party of supporting "a weak, postcommunist state that is not able to help its citizens while allowing oligarchs everything."

Kaczynski, a former activist in the independent Solidarity trade union movement, which toppled the Communists from power in 1989, has been determined to break what he called the power of the "uklad," a network of politicians, business and the old security services that he claims protected one another when the communist regime lost power.

Kaczynski has repeatedly claimed that the układ continued to flourish during the past 15 years because none of the governments that succeeded the communists were prepared to rid the public administration of anyone who had allegedly worked with the security services.

Since 2005, Law and Justice has pursued an uncompromising campaign against corruption by introducing strict investigations of those employed in the state administration or holding public office and dismissing those the party claimed had been part of the former communist establishment or had connections with the communist security services. The campaign has polarized Polish society, with news organizations and the opposition accusing the government of a witch hunt.

Civic Platform, which according to two recent but conflicting opinion polls, is either running neck-and-neck with Law and Justice or trailing it, will in any case need at least one coalition partner if it manages to win the most votes in October.

The party is already considering the possibility of a coalition with the small leftist Polish Peasant Party. The problem for Donald Tusk, the leader of Civic Platform, is that the newly established Left party, led by the former President Aleksander Kwasniewski, is also trying to bring this peasant party into his movement.

Kaczynski, by addressing the weekend congress of farmers, was trying to take voters away from the Polish Peasant Party, making it more difficult for Civic Platform to find a smaller coalition party, and at the same time, keeping Kwasniewski's party weak, said party officials.

Kaczynski is also desperate to weaken the party of Self Defense, which was the junior partner in his coalition until last month. Amid allegations of corruption involving the re-zoning and sale of agricultural land, Kaczynski dismissed Andrzej Lepper, the leader of Self Defense, who was also deputy prime minister and agriculture minister.

Ever since joining the coalition earlier this year, Lepper had kept making demands on Kaczynski as the price for keeping the government stable. He insisted, for example, on more spending for the rural communities and more social spending, which until now Kaczynski refused.

But in his campaign to win the crucial rural vote, economists said, Kaczynski was prepared to embark on a quick and expensive spending spree.

"There is a worry that Law and Justice will make all sorts of promises about increases in social spending," said Maciej Krzak, economist at the Center for Social and Economic Research in Warsaw. "This would mean that the budget deficit could get out of control."

The budget deficit is expected to be between 3 percent and 3.5 percent during 2007.