

Halal meat poser in Paris

POLITICISED: Far right leader Le Pen seizes issue for polls campaign

PARIS

A TELEVISION documentary's revelation that slaughterhouses around here have switched meat production entirely to halal methods has stirred a political storm in France, where attitudes to Europe's largest Muslim minority are a subtext in a presidential election campaign.

The *France 2* documentary last week said all of the abattoirs in the greater Paris region were producing only halal-style meat, selling some without labelling it as such to avoid the cost of running separate lines for halal and non-halal customers.

Far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, who is hoping to win voters away from centre-right President Nicolas Sarkozy ahead of the two-round election in April and May,

has seized on the issue.

"All the abattoirs of the Paris region have succumbed to the rules of a minority. We have reason to be disgusted," Le Pen told a rally in Lille on Saturday, pledging to file a legal complaint.

In a country known for its obsession with the provenance of its cuisine, the issue could play with a wider audience than the far right, including animal rights groups, consumer advocates and food industry professionals.

Some European animal rights campaigners say the Islamic halal and Jewish kosher rules for ritual slaughter are less humane than standard European practice, because they ban the practice of stunning animals before they are killed.

"This polemic requires us to call for more transparency," Frederic

Freund, director of a group called Aid to Animals in Abattoirs, told RTL radio during a call-in programme.

Halal meat, slaughtered according to Islamic norms, is a booming market in France and growing demand for it on school, hospital and company canteen menus has caused tension and misunderstandings between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Officials say most of the meat consumed in and around here is slaughtered outside the region and much of it still comes from slaughterhouses that use non-halal methods.

The French state is strictly secular, and politicians have intervened against the spread of some Muslim traditions in ways that critics say is populist and xenophobic.



Le Pen says all the abattoirs in Paris have succumbed to the rules of a minority

Sarkozy and his predecessor Jacques Chirac both won support among right-wing voters for banning Muslim full-face veils in public and headscarves in school. Reuters