

Headlines:

- **Austria Poised to Become First European Country to Elect Far-Right Party**
- **Pope Francis to Receive Sunni Muslim Leader at Vatican**
- **Pakistan Reacts Strongly to Latest Indian Missile Tests**

Details:

Austria Poised to Become First European Country to Elect Far-Right Party

Austria is a short step away from becoming the first European country to elect a far-right head of state. The anti-Islam and Eurosceptic Freedom Party (FPO) received more than a third of the vote in the first round of presidential elections on April 24. The two parties came on top, toppling the governing Social Democrats (SPO) and their conservative coalition partners. The unprecedented result triggered a party revolt that ousted SPO Chancellor Werner Faymann last week. The surge in support for the far-right party is a result of mounting angst about living standard and more than 100,000 asylum requests in Austria. The second round of the election is this Sunday, with FPO candidate Norbert Hofer against independent Alexander van der Bellen, a former Greens party leader. The two rivals have exchanged bitter attacks in the run-up to the decisive vote that comes amid right-wing gains across Europe. Mr Hofer, 45, has called Mr Van der Bellen a "fascist Green dictator" for saying as president he would block any government led by anti-Europe FPO boss Heinz-Christian Strache. The far-right leader has said he would refuse to swear in a female minister wearing a headscarf, which he says represents the oppression of women. Mr Van der Bellen, 72, says Hofer is just itching for the chance to dismiss the cabinet and usher in a right-wing government. Mr Hofer, a gun enthusiastic, says his most important political project is to secure borders. The far-right leader also voted against joining the EU in 1994. A poll for an Austrian newspaper last week found Mr Hofer ahead by a 53-47 margin based on 600 people surveyed. FPO has had a surge in popularity as Austria struggles to deal with migrants who have arrived in the country. The party's warnings about the security threat posed by Muslim refugees have hit the headlines. But the party has been on the rise for several years due to fears about employment and security. FPO regularly tops opinion polls with more than 30 per cent. Anton Pelinka, a political scientist at Central European University in Budapest, said, "The basic difference between van der Bellen and Hofer is their view of Europe." Nearly a third of eligible voters failed to cast ballots in the first round. [Source: Express UK].

Islamophobia is spreading like wildfire in the Western world. Austria is poised to become the first country to elect anti-Islamic officials and Trump's growing popularity ahead of the US general election, is a worrying trend for Muslims in the West. The world could turn out to be a very different place for Muslims in the West by the end of 2016.

Pope Francis to Receive Sunni Muslim Leader at Vatican

Pope Francis is to meet the grand imam of Cairo's Al-Azhar at the Vatican on Monday in an unprecedented encounter between the leader of the world's Catholics and the highest authority in Sunni Islam. Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, who heads the mosque and seat of learning considered the most prestigious institution in the main branch of Islam, will have an audience with the leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi told AFP. This audience is being prepared and has been scheduled for Monday," he said. "It will be a first". The hugely symbolic visit comes against the backdrop of a recent improvement in relations between the two faiths after serious tensions during the time of Francis's predecessor, Benedict XVI. Ties were badly soured when the now-retired Benedict made a September 2006 speech in which he was perceived to have linked Islam to violence, sparking deadly protests in several countries and reprisal attacks on Christians. Dialogue resumed in 2009 but was suspended again by Al-Azhar in 2011 when Benedict called for the protection of Christian minorities after a bomb attack on a church in Alexandria, an intervention that was perceived as meddling in Egypt's internal affairs. Relations have steadily improved since Francis became pope in 2013 with inter-faith dialogue near the top of his agenda, something he underlined with a personal message to the Muslim world to mark the end of the first month of

Ramadan of his pontificate. A representative of the Al-Azhar Mosque, Mahmoud Azab, took part in an inter-faith conference at the Vatican in March 2014 aimed at fostering cooperation on combating modern slavery and people trafficking. "The dialogue was never cut, it was just suspended," Azab said at the time, adding that the idea was not "dialogue for its own sake. There has to be a clear agenda." On a trip to Jordan and Israel in May 2014, Francis was accompanied by two old friends from his days in Buenos Aires, the Rabbi Abraham Skorka and Islamic studies professor Omar Abboud. He has also pursued a historic rapprochement with the Orthodox Church, meeting the Russian patriarch in Cuba last year, and overseen the finessing of Catholic thinking on the need for Jews to convert, easing long-standing tensions with Judaism. The 79-year-old pope made headlines in April when he returned from a trip to the migrant crisis island of Lesbos with three Syrian Muslim families who are now being put up by the Vatican as they apply for asylum in Italy. [Source: Daily Mail]

The Muslim world's rudderless leadership is inviting all sorts of bids by Western leaders to exert their influence over the affairs of the Muslim world. Pope Francis emboldened by the disarray in the Islamic countries is competing with his western secular counterparts for influence over the Muslim ummah.

Pakistan Reacts Strongly to Latest Indian Missile Tests

Pakistan reacted with "serious concerns" to archival India's recent test-firing of an anti-ballistic missile system and nuclear-armed submarine-based missiles in the Indian Ocean. These developments "are now leading to nuclearization of Indian Ocean" and Pakistan will take "all necessary measures" to defend its borders, foreign policy chief Sartaj Aziz told the national parliament on Thursday. India announced on May 15 it had test-fired a locally designed single-stage Ashvin advanced defense interceptor missile from a mobile launcher, saying it successfully destroyed an incoming nuclear-capable ballistic missile. "The deployment of these nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed missiles in the Indian Ocean will not only upset the strategic balance in South Asia, but will also affect the maritime security of all the 32 littoral states around the Indian Ocean," Aziz said. He added that Pakistan is not "oblivious" to its defense needs and will have to "upgrade its defensive capabilities through suitable technologies." "The development of an anti-ballistic missile system may give India a false sense of security, leading to unexpected complications," Aziz said, warning that Pakistan's efforts for peace and friendship with India must not be interpreted as a sign of weakness. Officials in Islamabad say their ballistic missiles can carry nuclear warheads to any part of India and development of battlefield "tactical" nuclear weapons has "effectively" countered the massive rival nation's alleged designs of imposing a sudden conventional war on Pakistan. Pakistan plans to highlight, internationally, "the dangerous implications of India's plans to nuclearize" the Indian Ocean, he told lawmakers. "One specific proposal under consideration is to move a resolution in the next session of the [U.N.] General Assembly in September 2016 to declare the Indian Ocean a nuclear-free zone," Aziz said. India and Pakistan tested nuclear devices in May 1998, raising fears of a nuclear confrontation in region. The two countries have fought three wars since 1947, and tensions over the divided Kashmir region have hampered efforts to improve bilateral relations. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government maintains it seeks neighborly relations with India. The countries need to engage with each other and resolve their disputes through peaceful negotiations, Sharif's national security adviser, Nasir Janjua, told VOA. "We are two nuclear states. We need to engage with each other," Janjua said. "If we can't be friends, let us not be enemies. We can't be enemies forever. Otherwise, we will destroy each other." A wide-ranging peace dialogue between India and Pakistan remains suspended. A recent diplomatic effort to get talks started was derailed by a terrorist attack on an Indian military base in January near the border with Pakistan. New Delhi alleged the attack was planned and executed by Pakistan-based militants. Officials in Islamabad insist they are cooperating in the Indian investigation, and a team of Pakistani experts also visited the Pathankot base as part of their own probe into the attack.

Ever since, the Kargil affair, India's military planners have revised their military doctrine to shift from a defensive modus operandi to an offensive one. This includes moving military assets closer to Pakistan's border, development of a missile shield and upgrade of nuclear weapons. All of this is the synthesis of India's Cold Start Strategy, made possible by Pakistan's incompetent military leadership that failed to press its advantage at Kargil.