

Lifestyle

# Pakistan street cricket comes to life after dark during Ramadan



Hassan Mohsin, a member of the Pakistan under-19 cricket team plays a shot during the tape ball night cricket tournament.



Cricketer Arbaz Khan plays a shot during the tape ball night cricket tournament during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan in Karachi.



Youngsters play during the tape ball night cricket tournament during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan in Karachi.



In this picture commuters ride past cricket players during the tape ball night cricket tournament.



Residents watch the tape ball night cricket tournament.



Cricketer Owais Khan plays a shot during the tape ball night cricket tournament.



A young supporter of the winning team hold prize money after the tape ball night cricket tournament.

After midnight during Ramadan, makeshift floodlights transform a central Karachi basketball court into an urban cricket arena, where dozens of young Pakistani men chase taped-up tennis balls zipping through the night air. Donkeys watch on from the outfield and goats rummage through nearby piles of rubbish, breaking occasionally for a pitch invasion. "After the Taraweeh (special Ramadan prayers), people crave entertainment so that is why many play cricket," batsman Waqas Danish told AFP. "They play all night, because some people can't wake up for breakfast if they sleep." Tape-ball games are ubiquitous across Karachi's streets throughout the year, but Ramadan sees night tournaments pop up in most neighbourhoods.

The uninitiated may struggle to unravel the mayhem of multiple overlapping matches in a cramped space, but for Karachi's street cricketers, there is method in the madness. The frenetic matches of between four and six overs per innings are concluded before sehri, the meal consumed ahead of daytime fasting.

They range from pick-up games on improvised concrete pitches to professional competitions on dusty ovals. "The kids and youths can't afford kits and all the accessories for playing hard-ball cricket, but they can easily afford the tape ball," competition organiser Taqdeer Afridi told AFP in Karachi.

Money is often involved — even though gambling is illegal in Pakistan — and big-hitting mercenaries are occasionally lured from surrounding neighbourhoods to



In this picture young cricketers pose for a photograph after winning a tape ball night cricket match during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan in Karachi. —AFP photos

play under lights that craftily tap into overhead power lines. A tennis ball is tightly bound with electrical tape, giving it extra weight so it swings much like a cricket ball, yet is less damaging if it hits a spectator, window — or even a passing rickshaw.

### 'Amazing' speed

Matches played in the poorest neighbourhoods can draw hundreds of spectators, with many onlookers admitting

that watching cricket all night helps with the day's fast. "All day they are sleeping. Maybe they go to their jobs for four or five hours," 19-year-old spectator Rahman Khan said. After Partition in 1947, cricket was considered the domain of the upper class, played at Karachi's posh clubs and elite schools.

But as the population boomed through the 1960s, cricket adapted to the sprawling metropolis and tennis balls emerged as a

substitute to the hard ball. The cheaper alternative — which also removes the need for costly equipment like batting pads — took on several experimental forms in the following decades, and is credited with bringing the sport to the everyday Pakistani. There is no consensus on when the first tape ball delivery was bowled or by who, but legends abound — and the one thing historians and fans agree on is that it originated in Karachi.

"The tennis ball without tape lacked speed," said veteran Nasir Ali, who recalls the 1980s as the formative years for the tape-ball game. "On an experimental basis we wrapped the ball with red tape and when it was bowled the speed was amazing," said the 64-year-old, who hosts an annual competition in his apartment block's courtyard.

### 'Watch the ball'

From legendary all-rounder Wasim Akram to modern-day pace star Shaheen Shah Afridi, many of Pakistan's top players credit street cricket as a positive influence on their techniques. "In cricket there is a saying: 'watch the ball' — it doesn't matter if it is a tennis ball or a taped ball or a hard ball," Pakistan national youth coach Mohammad Masroor told AFP. "If a batsman can hit any ball, he can play cricket." Watching young cricketers at a street pitch wedged between an elevated expressway and an apartment block in central Karachi, Masroor said rules adapted to the urban landscape hone a batsman's skills.

A hit back over the bowler's head and beyond the residential area on the full is six runs, but only one run if the ball rebounds off the apartment building. Players must also be aware of the "grumpy uncle or aunty" who is unwilling to return a ball hit into their home. A shot like that can cost a batsman more than just his wicket: they need to go buy a new ball, too. "Nothing stops them," said Masroor, grinning. —AFP



## Fit for a king... and queen: UK royals serve up 'Coronation Quiche' recipe

Move over Coronation Chicken, there's a new culinary concoction with UK royal approval for the crowning of King Charles III and Queen Consort Camilla — "Coronation Quiche". Seven decades after the lightly curried chicken dish was created for Queen Elizabeth II's crowning, her son on Monday unveiled the recipe for a baked savoury tart to mark his coronation next month.

Chosen with his wife, Camilla, who will also be formally crowned on May 6, the quiche was selected "in celebration of Coronation Big Lunches" occurring over the long weekend of events, Buckingham Palace said. The lunches, which aim to bring neighbours and communities together to celebrate the country's first coronation in 70 years, will be staged nationwide, primarily on Monday May 8.

Camilla has been patron of the associated Big Lunch initiative since 2013. In keeping with Charles' green environmental credentials, the new

Coronation Quiche does not contain meat but instead features spinach, broad beans and tarragon. The palace, which unveiled the recipe online, described it as "a deep quiche with a crisp, light pastry case and delicate flavours".

"Eat hot or cold with a green salad and boiled new potatoes — perfect for a Coronation Big Lunch," it added, also releasing a video of a palace chef making the savoury dish from scratch.

Coronation Chicken — a bright yellow dish of cold chicken in a curry cream sauce with a well-seasoned dressed salad of rice, green peas and mixed herbs, served cold — has become a British culinary classic.

It was created in 1953 by Constance Spry, then director of Le Cordon Bleu culinary school in Winkfield, near Windsor, to appeal to the tastes of guests from around the world. She had been tasked with putting on a banquet for foreign dignitaries after Elizabeth's coronation on June 2, 1953. —AFP

## J-Hope of BTS to begin mandatory South Korean military service

BTS star J-Hope was set to start his mandatory South Korean military service on Tuesday, local media reported, the second member to report for duty since the K-pop juggernaut went on hiatus last year. The septet has become a global cultural phenomenon, selling out stadiums and dominating charts while raking in billions for South Korea's economy and building an international legion of fans known as ARMY.

But all able-bodied South Korean men must serve at least 18 months in the military, and after a years-long debate about whether BTS deserved an exemption, Jin, the oldest member of the group, began his service in December.

J-Hope — whose full name is Jung Ho-seok — was set to begin his five-week basic training at an army boot camp in Gangwon province on Tuesday, Yonhap News Agency reported.

The 29-year-old posted pictures of himself with a buzzcut on the South Korean social media platform Weverse on Monday.

"I love you, ARMY. I'll go and come back safely!" he said. The post attracted thousands of comments from fans, with many expressing sorrow over the group's ongoing hiatus.

"Be careful and stay healthy... Say hi to Jin for us, please? We will miss you so much!" one wrote. "It suits you so well," another wrote of J-Hope's buzzcut. Jin left the comment "D-1" on one of J-Hope's Weverse posts on Monday — a nod to the fact he had one day left before the start of his service.

The septet's agency HYBE had confirmed on April 1 that J-Hope would begin his service, but did not disclose de-



In this file photo South Korean K-pop boy band BTS member J-Hope poses for a photo session during a press conference on BTS new album 'BE (Deluxe Edition)' in Seoul. —AFP

tails "to prevent any issues that might occur from crowding".

"The entrance ceremony is a time to be observed by military personnel and their families only," it had said. "Fans are advised to refrain from visiting the site."

### 'Excited'

J-Hope said during a livestream with fans last week that he was "excited" about his time in the military. "It will be a new experience, and I will be learning to fit into a new society, and I'm excited about that," he said. "In the meantime, what I look forward to is living each day in a normal way, which is different from my usual lifestyle. This could make me healthier."

The band had cited exhaustion and the pressures of stratospheric success

while dropping their bombshell hiatus announcement last year, saying they were taking a break to focus on their solo careers. Analysts have questioned what the future holds for the group after all seven members complete their military service. Some male K-pop stars have struggled to resume their careers after military service in a cut-throat industry where artists are easily replaceable. "During the absence, (BTS) could lose their public interest, and the decline in popularity will damage their business," Lee Taekgwang, a communications professor at Kyung Hee University, told AFP.

"It would not be easy for the boy band to reunite... this is not only the problem of BTS but also the problem of almost all (South Korean) boy bands and male celebrities." —AFP