

Bombs, guns knives, kites...

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ISLAMABAD (Reuters) - Flying a kite in Pakistan is a dangerous pastime.

Already it's banned for all but 15 days of the year but a provincial minister warned kite-flyers this week that any who cause injury or death with string made from metal or coated with glass could be tried under anti-terrorism laws.

The Punjabi chief minister's unprecedented threat came just ahead of the start of an annual kite-flying festival in the provincial capital, Lahore, Sunday.

Kite-flying in Pakistan and neighboring India often involves aerial duels in which participants try to bring down each other's kites using string coated in a sticky paste of ground-up glass or metal.

Every year, Pakistani media report dozens of deaths and injuries caused by kite flying, mainly of children and motorcyclists whose throats are sometimes cut by metal or glass-coated string.

"It is a matter of concern that a healthy sport is being turned into a game of death," the official APP news agency quoted Punjab Chief Minister Pervez Elahi as saying Tuesday.

Elahi said a crackdown had been launched against the sale of sharp kite string and threatened a permanent ban on kite-flying if deaths continued.

"Action under the Anti-Terrorism Act would be taken in case of deaths due to ... dangerous kite-flying string," he was quoted as saying.

Pakistan's Supreme Court banned kite-flying nationwide last year in response to an outcry over injuries and deaths. The ban was lifted for a 15-day period to allow the holding of this month's traditional kite-flying festival of Basant.

Some Islamist groups have staged protests in the past week after newspapers reported several deaths caused by kite-flying, denouncing the activity as un-Islamic.