



**Nigar Sultana Joty celebrates her hundred on the final day of the opening round Women's Bangladesh Cricket League match in Rajshahi yesterday.**  
PHOTO: BCB

## Records galore as Joty, Pinky hit tons

SPORTS REPORTER

The third and final day of the opening round of the Women's Bangladesh Cricket League witnessed two top national batters – Nigar Sultana Joty and Farzana Haque Pinky – scoring hundreds for their respective sides in the Central Zone versus North Zone match at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi yesterday.

Joty, the Central Zone skipper who resumed the day on 85, became the first Bangladeshi women's cricketer to score a hundred in the history of first-class competition during the opening hour of the day. She remained unbeaten on 153 off 253 balls to help her side post 387-8d and take a 147-run lead in the first innings.

Off spinner Jannatul Ferdous Sumona finished with 6-113 to become the second bowler after Central Zone's Nahida Akter to take a five-wicket haul in the match.

Later in the day, Pinky joined Joty in the list of century-makers with an unbeaten 102 off 226 balls. Pinky, Bangladesh's first centurion in women's international cricket, put up 196 runs in the opening stand with Ishma Tanjim (90 off 171 balls) to guide North Zone to 204-1 before both teams agreed on a stalemate.

**'We always want to emulate each other's performance'**

**Farzana Haque Pinky** credited her long-format preparation and practice, which helped her bat for extended periods, as the North Zone batter reflected on her brilliant performance with **The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan** yesterday. Pinky also discussed her rivalry with Nigar Sultana Joty, their mutual desire to play big innings, and the importance of the Women's Bangladesh Cricket League in preparing players for Test cricket.

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Although Pinky could not become the first centurion in first-class cricket after getting dismissed on 86 runs in North Zone's first innings, Joty claimed that it was Pinky's patient knock of 246 balls that inspired her to such a milestone.

"In the first innings, the opposition players, especially the way Pinky was batting with so much time and patience and Ishma was batting so nicely that I felt that I needed to bat that way too," Joty admitted after the match.

The Bangladesh captain was happy to see batters ruling the roost and scoring big runs.

"It's a good sign that the batters score good runs whatever the format is. It's important to score runs. If they can score runs, it boosts the confidence. As we have a vital series coming up, I think the batters will get more confidence there," she added.

Meanwhile, in the day's other match, South Zone skipper Rabeya Khan came up with an inspiring all-round performance (70 runs and seven wickets including 5-18 in the second innings) to propel her side to a 10-wicket win against East Zone at the Bangla Trac Cricket Academy Ground.



## NCL T20 FINAL Akbar, Naim look to cut loose

SPORTS REPORTER

Akbar Ali's Rangpur Division will pit their skills against Mohammad Naim's Dhaka Metro as the NCL T20 final unfolds at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium today.

The two sides have faced off twice already in the tournament, with Dhaka Metro winning the first encounter by seven wickets and Rangpur winning the second game – a virtual semifinal scenario – by four wickets in the first qualifier.

Rangpur will look to offset Metro's top-order with their all-rounders. Alauddin Babu, who is the second-highest wicket-taker in the tournament so far, has shone with all-round performances, while pacer Mukidul Islam will want to keep his improvement curve going.

In skipper Akbar, Rangpur have someone in the middle to really help the scoring rate, having batted at a strike rate of just over 150, averaging over 41.

Akbar's counterpart, Mohammad Naim, has been in fine form as the top run-scorer of the tournament

## A year of chaos and clean sweeps in Tests

ASHFAQ UL ALAM

Cricket witnessed its busiest year in Tests in two decades in 2024, with 50 Tests taking place till now and three more set to begin on December 26 – not bad for a format that has supposedly been on a virtual deathbed for years in the eyes of many.

The last time the annual Test count had crossed the half-century mark was in 2004, in which 51 five-day matches took place. This year is set to end with 53 Tests – one fewer than 2002.

Had the weather been kinder in Greater Noida, India, in early September, or if the BCCI – the richest board in the world – had installed a modern drainage system at the Greater Noida Sports Complex, the Afghanistan-New Zealand one-off Test would not have been washed away, and the Test count in 2024 could have matched the tally from 2002.

As the jam-packed year in Tests winds down, it's natural to wonder which team have been the most dominant out of the 12 Test-playing countries.

The answer to this question, however, is not that straightforward.

England have won the most matches this year, nine, but they have also lost more than any other team, eight.

Australia have been mostly dominant this year in Tests, despite having suffered a loss to the West Indies at home in January; against a team who are currently bottom of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) points table.

The Aussies also did not play Tests outside their continent at all, as their

**This year, 11 of 19 Test series have ended in clean sweeps: Australia clean swept New Zealand and Pakistan; New Zealand clean swept India and South Africa; Sri Lanka clean swept Bangladesh and New Zealand; Bangladesh clean swept Pakistan; India clean swept Bangladesh; South Africa clean swept Sri Lanka and Bangladesh; and England clean swept the West Indies.**



only tour was to New Zealand, which surely helped them boost their numbers in the WTC table, where they are currently third.

At present, South Africa top the WTC table and are definitely a candidate for this year's best Test team.

But then again, in their only tour against a team considered one of the top sides, the Proteas suffered a 2-0 defeat in New Zealand.

The usually dominant India have also been inconsistent, suffering their first-ever series sweep in a three-match series against New Zealand in October-November.

Clean sweeps over South Africa and India may indicate that New Zealand have been the team to beat this year, but the Black Caps themselves were whitewashed at home by Australia and away in Sri Lanka this year.

And if one refuses to go too much into the details and looks at win percentages to determine who has been the best, the title would go to Ireland, who have won both of their one-off Test assignments against Afghanistan and Zimbabwe.

Even without counting Ireland's one-off successes as clean sweeps, 2024 has been the year of whitewashes in Tests.

Out of the 19 completed series this year, barring the two one-off series, 11 have ended in clean sweeps.

The high number of one-sided series may seem like the result of one or two teams being treated as whipping boys, but that has not been the case.

Australia have series sweeps over Pakistan and New Zealand – the latter have a 2-0 sweep over the Proteas and a 3-0 win over India to their name.

Both India and South Africa handed Bangladesh 2-0 series defeats, while the Tigers, just like the Aussies, whitewashed Pakistan at home. Bangladesh also drew a Test against the West Indies, who were beaten 3-0 in England.

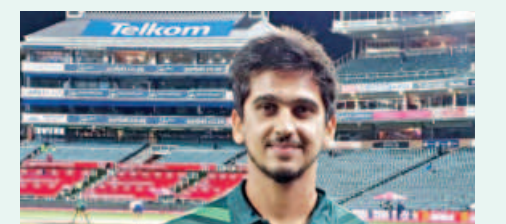
The chaotic results column is overall a good sign for Test cricket.

Bangladesh winning in Pakistan and the West Indies, India getting humbled at home by the Kiwis, and South Africa seemingly finding their spring back in the longest format are all positive indications of what's in store.

Even though the number of Tests is set to drop off in 2025 as the current WTC cycle comes to an end, neutral fans will hope to see the chaos sparked this year sustain, making every Test series in 2025 a must-watch.

AGENCIES

Opener Saim Ayub hit his second century of the series – and his third in five innings – as Pakistan completed a series clean sweep over South Africa with a 36-run win (DLS method) in the third ODI at the Wanderers Stadium on Sunday. Left-handed opening batsman Ayub made a sparkling 101 off 94 balls, featuring 13 fours and two sixes.



- 🇵🇰 Pakistan became the first team to whitewash South Africa in an ODI series in South Africa.
- 🇵🇰 This was only the third instance of Pakistan winning an ODI bilateral series in South Africa.
- 🇵🇰 It is also the second time they have whitewashed any team in the top 10 of the ICC men's team rankings outside Asia in a bilateral series featuring at least three games. They defeated the West Indies 3-0 away from home back in 2005.
- 🇵🇰 Pakistan have won their third straight ODI series under the captaincy of Mohammad Rizwan. All three victories have come away from home. They beat Australia and Zimbabwe by 2-1 margins before blanking the Proteas 3-0.

## Rampant Liverpool and their Christmas Day curse

AGENCIES

**Liverpool swept four points clear at the top of the Premier League as Mohamed Salah's masterclass inspired a memorable 6-3 rout of Tottenham on Sunday. Salah delivered a sublime performance featuring two goals and a pair of assists. The Reds were firing from all cylinders as Luis Diaz (2), Dominik Szoboszlai (1), and Alexis Mac Allister (1) all found the net as Arne Slot's side ran riot in north London. Despite their stellar form leading them to the top on Christmas Day, Liverpool would want to stay in the present rather than draw inspiration from the past to take the title as their previous record from December 25 does not evoke much confidence.**



“Of course it means something, because you always prefer to be where we are at the moment ... but you know just as well as I know, because I've won the [Dutch] league once, how hard it is to win it. You have to keep on going, keep on going, every three days you have to be on top of your game, every minute of the game. That's why it's so hard to win it, because it's not always easy to show up every three or four days.”

Arne Slot  
Liverpool manager

- 🇬🇧 Exactly half the time – in 16 seasons out of 32 – the team top of the Premier League table on Christmas Day has gone on to win the title.
- 🇬🇧 This is the seventh time Liverpool have stood first on December 25 but their only success since the top-flight's 1992 rebrand was in 2019-20.
- 🇬🇧 Liverpool have been in this position more than anyone else in English football history – 21 times, winning 11 of the previous 20.
- 🇬🇧 Going back to the Premier League era, Arsenal led the table over Christmas for a fourth time last season – and, like the previous three occasions, failed to lift the trophy.
- 🇬🇧 In contrast Chelsea and Manchester City – plus one-time winners Blackburn Rovers and Leicester City – have always won the title when they have led the pack at this stage.
- 🇬🇧 On four occasions a team have been outside the top four at Christmas and won the title – including last season. Manchester City were fifth at the time – six points behind Arsenal, albeit with a game in hand, and finished champions for a fourth successive time.
- 🇬🇧 The others to do so were Manchester United, having been fifth in 1996-97, Arsenal (sixth in 1997-98) and Pep Guardiola's City again (eighth in 2020-21).



**Penalty corner specialist Ashrafur Islam shoots one at goal during the opening match of the Paragon Group Victory Day Hockey competition at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday. Ashrafur's five goals helped Navy trounce BKSP 8-2 as hockey returned to the blue turf after a seven-month gap.**

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED