

DECADES OF FRIENDSHIP

BY K.H.ONG

(SPORTSWRITER)

FORMER Malaysian Thomas Cup captain Teh Kew San had mixed emotions as he marked his 91st birthday on Jan 26, 2026 – the same day his close friend and former national teammate Tan Yee Khan passed away at the age of 86.

Both were members of Malaysia's victorious 1967 Thomas Cup squad, which famously defeated Indonesia in a controversial final in Jakarta.

"While I am deeply saddened by the loss of a dear friend, I am also relieved for him, as he had been suffering for some time," Kew San told me.

For Kew San, memories of Yee Khan are inseparable from a golden era of Malaysian badminton.

He first met Yee Khan in Singapore in 1960, when the latter represented Malaysia as a junior player while Kew San was with the national senior team preparing for the Thomas Cup.

"He was an erratic player – very fast and unpredictable. He loved to attack, but his defence was not as strong.

"When I captained the 1967 Thomas Cup team, Yee Khan gave no trouble at all. He was very kind and always looked after the players," Kew San recalled.

Although Yee Khan was primarily a doubles specialist, most notably alongside the late Boon Bee, Kew San said his friend was also an outstanding singles player.

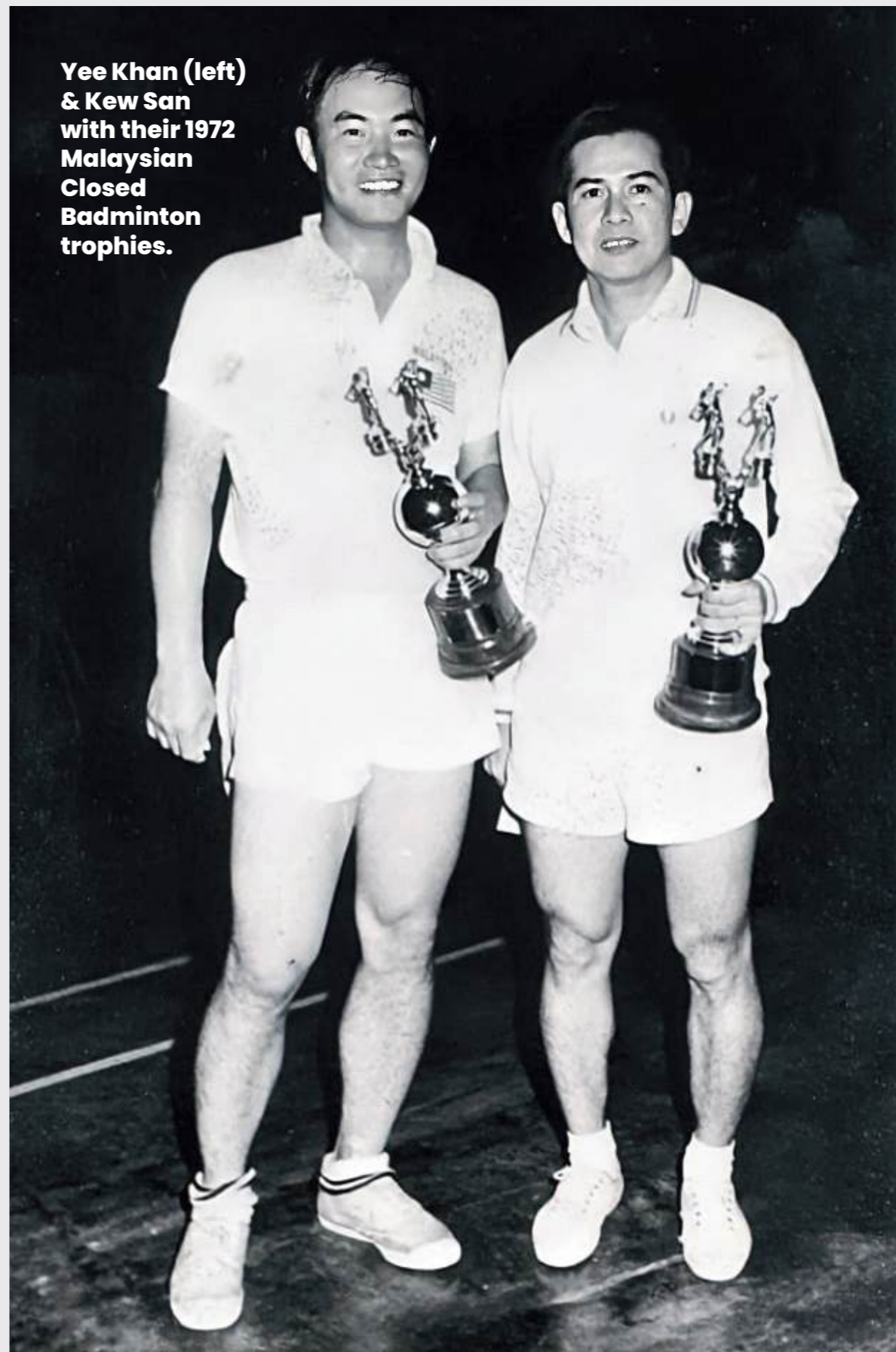
He highlighted Yee Khan's victory over rising star Tan Aik Huang in the final of the 1964 World Invitation Tournament in Tokyo, Japan, as well as his upset win against seven-time All England champion Erland Kops in the first round of the 1966 All England Championships.

"I last met Yee Khan when all the former 1967 Thomas Cuppers attended my 80th birthday celebration at the Penang Club.

"I was disappointed that he could not make it to the BAM Appreciation Night in 2012 at the Palace of the Golden Horses – only Datuk Yew Cheng Hoe and I were there," Kew San added.

The duo had another opportunity to reunite in 2023, when the then Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah, conferred the title of Datuk on members of the 1967 Thomas Cup team at Istana Negara.

However, Kew San was unwell at the time,



Yee Khan (left) & Kew San with their 1972 Malaysian Closed Badminton trophies.

suffering from eye problems and a persistent cough, and was unable to attend the ceremony. Yee Khan, though physically weak, made the journey with the aid of a wheelchair.

Kew San's wife, Datin Ng Mei Ling, recalled that Yee Khan would call her husband once or twice a year.

"When he phoned, he would playfully change his voice to prank Kew San. But when Kew San became hard of hearing, Yee Khan eventually stopped calling.

"He was a very kind person who often invited fellow Thomas Cuppers and national players to reunions at his SeaView Resort on Pangkor Island.

"Besides badminton, he also represented Malaysia in golf, competing in the Putra Cup tournaments," said Mei Ling, herself a former national badminton champion.

Friendship forged since 1960 – more than titles or victories – mattered most to Kew San and Yee Khan, a bond that endured long after their playing days were over.