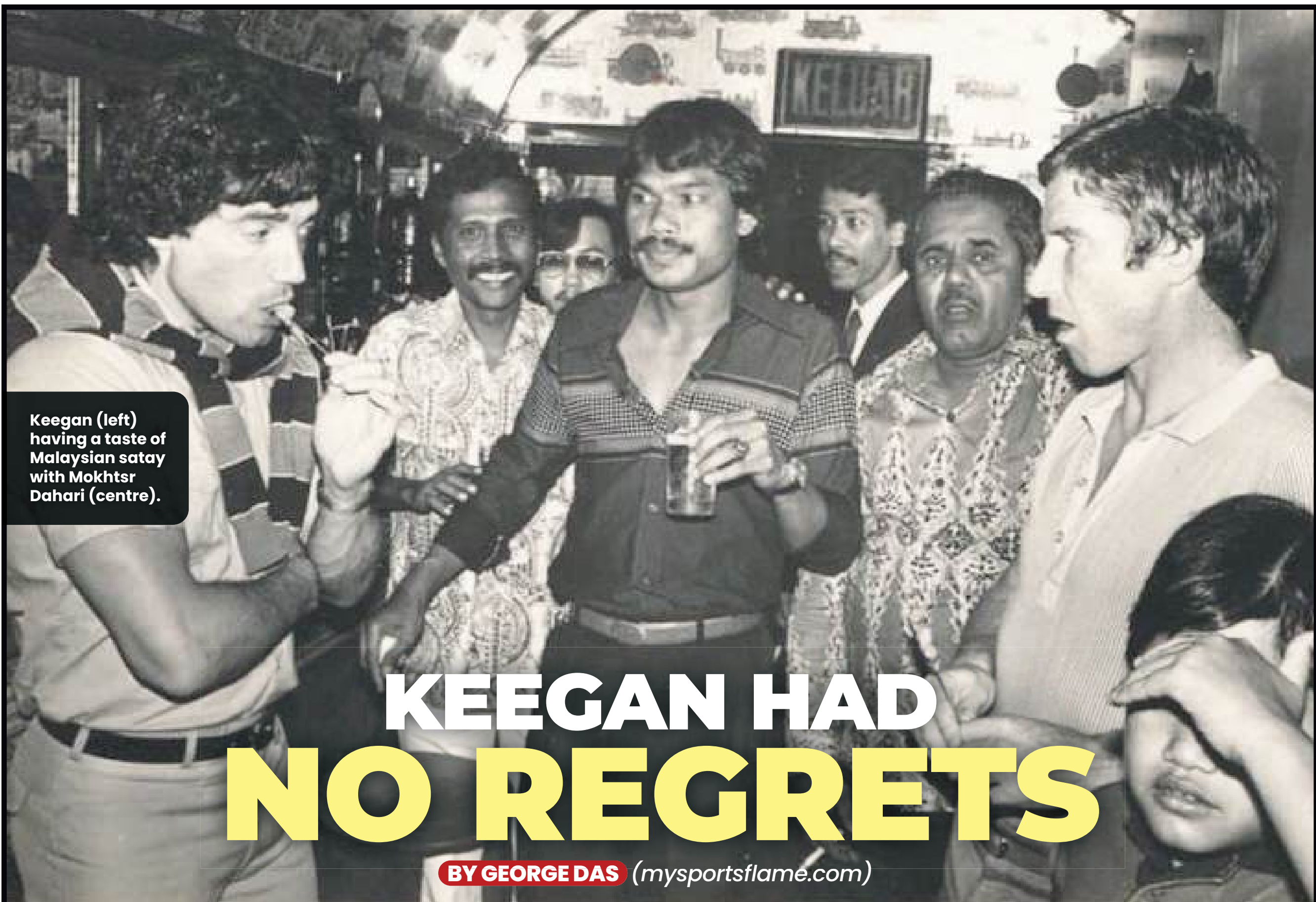




Keegan (left) having a taste of Malaysian satay with Mokhtsr Dahari (centre).

KEEGAN HAD NO REGRETS

BY GEORGE DAS (mysportsflame.com)

WE took a casual walkabout inside Sungai Wang Plaza, a budget-friendly shopping landmark in Kuala Lumpur.

It was more like an exploring the many small stores retailing in clothes, shoes, watches, electronic items, and not forgetting food.

He was amazed and would remark: "I've never been to such a place with very small, organized retail shops."

The year 1984. The date 17th August. The city Kuala Lumpur.

The personality I was keeping company was none other than Kevin Keegan, the just retired English footballer.

Keegan was brought to coach and play for the Malaysian Tigers team in the Merdeka Football Tournament that was to kick-off in a couple of days at the famed Merdeka Stadium.

We, R.Velu (the late) and I were instrumental in bringing him our way for a one month stint.

We worked with GOLD FLAKE, a prominent cigarette brand, to sponsor him. The sponsorship deal was about RM150, 000.

That memory of Keegan was brought about by his passing on 20th July 2026 at the age of 75. He died of stomach cancer.

After an hour or so inside Sungai Wang Plaza, we went for lunch which was Chinese Chicken and Char Sui rice. He loved the taste. Keegan also relished satay.

As he devoured the chicken and Char Sui, we spoke about his football career. No boast. Just recalling his past. Reminiscing more like it.

I found him vibrant, humble and easily approachable. You can't say this of today's sports personalities.

Some may remember him for his ill-fated reign as the England manager while others would celebrate as a classic attacking midfield player with Liverpool, Hamburg, Southampton and Newcastle United (and later manager).

As I sat there with him, I realized that his football career was without a doubt a reflection of the man himself.

As P.C. Shivadas, the then the Group Editor of New Straits Times viewed him in his "PERSONALLY SPEAKING" column: "He signs autographs tirelessly, chats with impish good humour with one and all."

He told me at that lunch that he had difficulty breaking into the English 1st Division Football League. The reason... Managers saw him as being too small in the attacking role.

The Manager who gave him a break was Liverpool's Bill Shankly... "Everything that I achieved in football was all due to Bill Shankly. He was an amazing individual and I respect him a lot."

Keegan viewed Shankly as a father figure and a great motivator. Shankly saw his raw pace and scoring instincts playing for 4th Division Scunthorpe. Signed him on for Liverpool for £50 per week.

He always gave praise to Shankly and the club: "Liverpool and Bill made me. Not just a footballer but also made me a person."

In his role with the Malaysian Tigers, he was so enthusiastic, guiding and



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motivating them to give their all. He had tried to get them to play a faster paced game.

Despite not being able to help the "Tigers" qualify for the semifinals of the Merdeka Tournament, Keegan was not disappointed with the youngsters performance.

"I think they (Tigers) were alright. They lost only once (3-0) to South Korea. They could have done better."

Keegan wrote in his column for The Star, "A DATE WITH GOAL".....

"It's important the Tigers are kept together in order for long term results to be achieved."

"Send them in pairs to English clubs. They can learn a great deal there. See how the English professionals train and how serious they take their job when they play."

"The Tigers can learn a little more about stamina."

Wherever he went in Kuala Lumpur, Keegan was accosted by fans and he never brushed them aside. Always accommodating.

He recalled: "When I was a youngster and football crazy, I once waited patiently for an autograph. The player ignored my request. My adulation for him did not matter. I did not want to be like him."

My hours with Keegan during his short stay, showed me his warmth. He may have been an English legend, a rare footballer with two Ballon d'Or awards (1978 & 1979) but I saw him for his good nature.

He also showed me that there are some down to earth sportsmen. Muhammad Ali was one such person and the other was Keegan.

Both inspired generations with their passion, leadership, discipline and never-give-up spirit. King Kev, Mighty Mouse.....

Joseph Kevin Keegan,
You'll Never Walk Alone!