



**All smiles:** Harleen Tan posing for a photograph after beating Chloë Lo for the Under-13 title. — Andrew Cross

# Four out of eight ain't bad

Malaysia the big winners again at Asian Junior Squash C'ships

**PETALING JAYA:** Malaysia ruled the roost again at the Asian Junior Squash Championships when they ran away with four of the eight titles at stake in Pattaya yesterday.

Although the haul was one short of what they had achieved in Macau three years ago, Malaysia were the big winners as they did extremely well in the lower-age group categories and also extended their stranglehold in the girls' Under-19 event.

In the boys' Under-15 and Under-13 class, the national team reigned supreme with all the semi-finalists coming from Malaysia.

National assistant head coach Andrew Cross was initially cautious about predicting the country's hopes at the meet as there had not been any Asian junior meets since 2019.

However, the players once again rose to the occasion and as predicted, Harleein Tan started the title chase when she defeated Chloe Lo 11-3, 11-2, 11-0 in just 14 minutes to give Malaysia their first title.

Sim Yeak Wei then defeated teammate Raziq Putra Fakhur Razi 11-6, 6-11, 11-4, 8-11, 11-3 for the boys' Under-13 crown.

In the Under-15 final, M. Nickhileswar came out tops against compatriot Aqil Mirza Khairil Fariz, winning 11-8, 11-9, 11-6.

The girls' Under-19 was perhaps the most crucial and favourite Aira Azman did not disappoint as she secured an 11-8, 11-3, 11-2 win over Kirstie Wong of Hong Kong.

Malaysia had won the title in 2018 and 2019 through Chan Yiwen.

Cross was relieved with the performance of the entire team where Malaysia had the most number of finalists (nine).

"Winning four titles is the best among the countries in the fray. We won five the last time and it is four this time. The other countries could not win more than one title," said Cross.

## FINAL RESULTS

### BOYS

Under-19: Noor Zaman (Pak) bt Joachim Chuah 11-9, 10-12, 11-5, 11-9.

Under-17: Na Joo-young (Kor) bt Low Wa Sern 11-7, 11-8, 13-11.

Under-15: M. Nickhileswar bt Aqil Mirza Khairil Fariz 11-8, 11-9, 11-6.

Under-13: Sim Yeak Wei bt Raziq Putra Fakhur Razi 11-6, 6-11, 11-4, 8-11, 11-3.

### GIRLS

Under-19: Aira Azman bt Kirstie Wong (HK) 11-8, 11-3, 11-2.

Under-17: Akari Midorikawa (Jpn) bt Goh Zhi Xuan 11-4, 11-4, 11-6.

Under-15: Anahat Singh (Ind) bt Ena Kwong (HK) 11-7, 12-10, 11-5.

Under-13: Harleein Tan bt Chloe Lo 11-3, 11-2, 11-0.

"We had nine finalists while the next best was Hong Kong who had three.

"We must put into perspective the work the country has done for squash. The coaches have been working to push the standard up and it has been reflected in the players' performance in this event."

Cross also praised the way Joachim Chuah played against Noor Zaman of Pakistan although the Malaysian lost 9-11, 12-10, 5-11, 9-11 in the Under-19 final.

Low Wa Sern is the other player who fell at the last hurdle as he lost 7-11, 8-11, 11-13 to Na Joo-young of South Korea in the boys' Under-17 final.

Japan's Akari Midorikawa of Japan also lived up to her top billing by winning the girls' Under-17 title by beating Malaysian Goh Zhi Xuan 11-4, 11-4, 11-6.

The girls' Under-15 event was the only one that Malaysia did not have a finalist as India's Anahat Singh triumphed over Ena Kwong of Hong Kong 11-7, 12-10, 11-5.

Meanwhile, it has been an unforgettable week for Aira Azman who tasted success in both her studies and squash.

"It was definitely a great week for me to achieve this two success. Winning this title and scoring 6As in SPM. It shows that hard-work pays off," said the 17-year-old Aira whose sister Aifa is an established professional player.