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New Kedah coach Cheng Hoe plays down promotion hopes

By **LOGANATH VELLOO**

GEORGE TOWN: Kedah's new caretaker coach Tan Cheng Hoe feels it is probably too late for the Red Eagles to eye promotion to the Super League this year.

Cheng Hoe, who was the assistant to national coach K. Rajagopal, took over the Kedah head coach duties from Australian David Mitchell on Thursday.

Mitchell's contract was not terminated, but he was instructed by the Kedah FA (KFA) exco to take a "rest" following unsatisfactory results in the first half of the Premier League.

Kedah, who were expected to be among the front runners for a top two spot which guarantees promotion to the Super League, were fifth at the halfway mark of the Premier League. Boasting high-profile local players like Baddrol Bakhtiar and Muhd Khyril Muhymeen, the northerners notched five wins, one draw and five defeats in the first half of the league campaign.

After last night's match against UiTM, which Kedah drew 1-1, the Red Eagles trail leaders Police by 15 points and second-placed Penang by nine.

"With just 11 matches left in the second

round, it is a tall order to expect Kedah to catch up with the top two. It is more realistic to aim for a top-four finish and qualify for the Malaysia Cup," said Cheng Hoe.

Sitting on the Kedah bench is not a new experience for the former national player, who served as an assistant coach to Jorgen Larsen (2002-03), Mirandinha (2004) and Mohd Azraai Khor (2004-09). But this is his first stint as an M-League team head coach.

KFA have also terminated the contract of midfielder Adriano Pellegrino, who did not play a single minute of competitive football in Malaysia since being signed in January.

The 29-year-old Australian was not cleared to play by FAM because he featured for an academy team in the New South Wales league prior to signing for Kedah.

And 31-year-old Brazilian midfielder Aender Naves Mesquita, who featured for Hong Kong's South China FC last year, has been signed on as replacement. The other three foreigners on Kedah's books are Billy Mehmet (Ireland), Adam Griffiths (Australia) and Jose Gomez (Spain).