

PM: Once in a lifetime ^{STAR} 1 1 FEB 2002 visit to Antarctica

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said his visit to Antarctica is a "once in a lifetime visit" although he would miss attending the open houses during the Chinese New Year celebrations.

In a 10-minute conversation via satellite telephone with Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, the Prime Minister said he would also miss the Hari Raya Haji celebrations.

"I would like to wish all Chinese and all Malaysians a happy Chinese New Year and I hope we celebrate Chinese New Year together by visiting each other and enjoying all the cakes being prepared," he told Dr Ling during the call arranged by Astro for a special programme aired by Radio Era on Saturday.

Dr Mahathir, who is on leave, was accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar and Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak. They travelled to Antarctica on the Russian ice breaker, *Kapitan Dranitsyn*, from Us-

huaia in Argentina.

Dr Mahathir also described the cold weather and beauty of the place.

"We took a cruise among the small icebergs to see the beauty of this wonderful continent," he said.

Dr Ling informed the Prime Minister that the Year of the Horse could be considered as "Mahathir's Year" because the "Ma" in his name also meant horse in Mandarin.

"The horse is a strong intelligent animal, but most importantly, the horse has a good sense of direction," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he hoped he didn't behave like a horse which jumped around too much.

"I hope I will go straight and be able to be of service to the country and all Malaysians," he added.

Dr Ling told Dr Mahathir of the last minute buying spree and traffic jams in the capital.

He said the stock market was very strong, adding that he expected it to remain the same after the festive season.

"Everyone is on a last minute buying spree and we are also getting ready to *balik kampung*," he added.