

# US Muslims face problem in training imam, leaders

Net -7 JUN 2002

**PETALING JAYA, Thurs.** — The Muslim community in the US is facing major problems in training *imam* and Islamic religious leaders due to the lack of Islamic institutions.

Professor of Islamic and Christian-Muslim Relations Ibrahim Abu-Rabi from Hartford Seminary in the US said: "There is an increasing need to train *imam* and religious leaders who could cater to the needs of the American Muslim community.

"We have to train *imam* and religious leaders not only in Pakistan and Southeast Asia but also in America itself so that they can be leaders for the American Muslim community," he said.

Prof Ibrahim said in the US context, it was insufficient for *imam* and religious leaders to only learn Arabic as they should also be fluent in English for them to understand the needs of Muslims there.

He was speaking after addressing a talk on *Islam and The West* at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations here today.

Unlike the US Christian community which had special institutions and training centres for priests, the Muslim community faced problems in training religious leaders to cater to the needs of the community.

Prof Ibrahim said there were about six million Muslims in the US including immigrants.

He said more efforts are being taken in the US to make sure the Americans understand what Islam is all about so it would no longer be perceived as being linked to terrorism.

"Islam is a religion that emphasises peace and harmony if we practice it wisely," he added.

He said the Middle East conflict

could be resolved by establishing a Palestinian state.

On traditional Islamic education centres such as *madrasah* in Pakistan, which had been linked to terrorists and terrorism, he said traditional Islamic education and its curriculum needed to be reformed to meet the demands of the modern world.

"This traditional Islamic education is not up to the modern times therefore, reformation is needed to meet the needs of the contemporary era and this is what the Muslim leaders had not paid attention to," he said.

Commenting on the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's meeting with the head of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II, at the Vatican tomorrow, he said: "I think it is very interesting to have a Muslim and Catholic dialogue and it is one way for better inter-faith understanding."