

# Mix with others, Muslims urged

BY JACK WONG AND SHARON LING

KUCHING: Muslims must work hard to project themselves as a successful and enlightened group to avert suspicions brought about by ill-informed prejudices, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

The Prime Minister added that Muslims were still, in many cases, viewed with suspicion and many non-Muslims find it difficult to relate them with progress and modernity.

He said ring-fencing themselves from the rest of the population would only reinforce the mistrust against them and amplify the misconceptions. "Isolation provides grist for mischievous myths. I would advocate Muslims to inte-

grate themselves at community events and contribute positively to nation building efforts," Abdullah said when opening the 12th assembly of the Regional Islamic Da'wah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Rsieap).

The Prime Minister said this was a challenge to Muslims, particularly to those who formed the minority community in non-Muslim countries.

He urged them to try to emulate the numerous examples of immigrants that formed minority communities in foreign countries.

He said there were those who claim that terrorist acts perpetrated by some Muslims were representative of Islam and others who see the religion as intolerant and promoted violence.

"This is patently untrue as Islam is a

religion of peace. It abhors violence and the unnecessary taking of life."

The Prime Minister said if Muslims portray themselves as law abiding, peace loving and prove to the rest they are not a source of conflict, it would go a long way to dispel the irrational fears about them and Islam.

Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, who is also president of Riseap, an umbrella body to 54 Muslim-based organisations from 22 countries, said the organisation would bring together Muslims and non-Muslims from all over the world for a big dialogue in Sydney next year.

The session is an attempt to forge bitter understanding and to discuss ways to build a peaceful world.