

Arabs urged to invest in image-building in US

An influential American Muslim group on Monday urged Arab businesses to invest in image-building in the US to secure their long-term interests.

By Shakir Husain, Staff Reporter
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Dubai: An influential American Muslim group on Monday urged Arab businesses to invest in image-building in the US to secure their long-term interests.

"If the image of Islam and Muslims is not repaired in America, Muslim and Arab business interests will continue to be on a downward slide in the US," said Parvez Ahmad, chairman of the board of the Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

The political backlash against DP World taking over management of six key US ports was "really an issue that gets to the core of this problem," he said.

Referring to the volatile nature of politics on Capitol Hill, Ahmad said it is "very easy for one person to create the hysteria and have a backlash."

The public firestorm over DP World began after New York Democratic Senator Charles Schumer said he was against an Arab company managing US ports.

A US delegation led by CAIR officials yesterday held discussions with Al Habtoor group chairman Khalaf Al Habtoor and other businessmen in Dubai about a \$50-million public relations campaign that the US group has launched in the US to change negative public perceptions about Islam.

"It is the most ambitious public relations campaign anywhere in the world that the Muslims have thought about to change perceptions about Islam," Ahmad said, calling on Arab businesses to make contributions towards the campaign that will run for five years.

"Do not think about your contributions as donations. Think about it from the perspective of rate of return. The investment of \$50 million will give you billions of dollars in return for 50 years," the CAIR official said.

He said it was important to deal with the image problem in the US because America will "continue to remain a superpower and the largest economy in the world for at least the next 50 years."

Former Congressman Paul Ridley, a member of the delegation, expressed concern that a "few voices representing bigotry, racism and ignorance" were able to prevail on public policy on the DP World issue.

"I am amazed at these voices of members of Congress. I know they have a better understanding than the words they convey publicly suggest," Ridley said.

CAIR, which is located near the US Senate, plans to boost its activities with a new \$24-million office building.

It has acquired land for a new seven-storey building and is now raising funds to start construction.

"This building will provide CAIR \$3 million per year in revenues. That will provide enough stability from an operational side," Ahmad said.

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