

RANDY BORSST/staff photographer

The 4,800-square-foot Ismaili Muslim mosque is on Orchard Lake Road, between Eight Mile and Nine Mile, in Farmington Hills.

## Spiritual leader puts blessing on new mosque

Rain, peace prayed for at ceremony

By Bob Sklar  
staff writer

**T**HE SPIRITUAL leader of 1 million Ismaili Muslims prayed for rain and peace in blessing a new mosque in Farmington Hills Sunday. It is the first Dawoodi Bohra prayer hall in the Western Hemisphere.

After hearing about the U.S. drought, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin of Bombay, India, said through an interpreter Monday: "I prayed for rain."

His Holiness, as followers call him, shared a moment with the press before a daily afternoon prayer service. Worshipers at the five daily prayer services face East, toward the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

A spry 75 and a self-proclaimed ambassador of peace, His Holiness called the two summits between President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev "a good sign for peace."

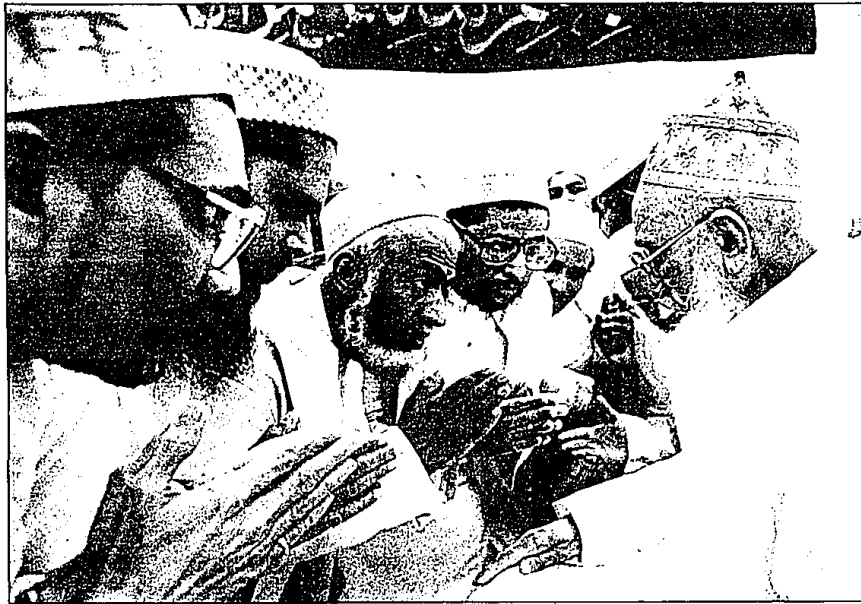
The 3,000 Dawoodi Bohra followers who live in the United States "are very happy and are living in comfort," he said.

He prayed for continued American prosperity and for "all people who live in this country to live happily and peacefully."

FARMINGTON HILLS was chosen for the Dawoodi Bohra's first mosque in the Western Hemisphere because of the religious sect's concentration of followers within five miles of the city.

About 1,300 Dawoodi Bohra followers from Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas, Chicago, New York, Toronto, London, Ohio, Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates attended Sunday's blessing of the 4,800-square-foot mosque.

"This is special," said Livonia resident Shaikh Noruddin Yamani, president of the 35-family congregation.



RANDY BORSST/staff photographer

Dawoodi Bohra followers pray before the religious sect's spiritual leader, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin (right), in the

new Ismaili Muslim mosque in Farmington Hills Monday afternoon.



## cultural collage

"His Holiness resembles Mecca for us," said follower Dawood Diwan of Los Angeles. "You can compare his visit to that of the Pope."

"What people desire is closeness," said Dr. Shabbir Shakir of Bakersfield, Calif. "We want to be close to him. That's the first doctrine of our belief."

The wood, brick and clay mosque, on Orchard Lake Road near Eight Mile, is divided into two sections: the masjid, or prayer hall, and the

sahan, or multipurpose room.

His Holiness — sporting a long white beard and dressed in the traditional libasul-anwar, or garb, and the topi, or hat — sat in a white broad-based chair with a pillow underneath as he blessed followers Monday.

He gave each follower a white handkerchief. Special visitors received a wool prayer shawl. Diwan recounted how valuable stores amid such blessed gifts have miraculously escaped damage in fires.

SAYING HE was "very warmly received," His Holiness called the people of the United States and Farmington Hills "very broad-minded and friendly."

Farmington Hills Mayor Jody Soronen greeted His Holiness Monday. On Sunday, the Wayne County Sheriff's Department escorted him from Detroit Metropolitan Airport to the Farmington Hills home of his host, Fida Bohra.

This marks His Holiness' third visit to the United States. He blessed the ground for the new Farmington Hills mosque during his last visit in 1986. His weeklong U.S. visit will end Friday when he leaves for London.

Considered a small sect of the

Muslim religion, Dawoodi Bohra beliefs are based on the teaching of the Fatemi imams 885 years ago. Fatemi imam founded Cairo, Egypt, in 969 A.D.

His Holiness was raised and taught in the Fatimi philosophy of literature, art and economics. He followed his father as leader of the sect and is the religion's 52nd imam in the Fatimi tradition.

He holds a doctor of theology degree from Alligarh Muslim University in India and a doctor of Islamic sciences degree from Al Azhar University in Egypt.

His sect prides itself on allegiance to discipline, education, tolerance, generosity, piety, moral values, patriotism, and law and order.

## Play called important part of early learning

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

Play can be a child's best teacher, according to an early childhood educator, who this week proposed a hands-on approach to learning for all Farmington kindergartners.

"Perhaps we're doing some things they're not really ready for," said Richard Rutter, supervisor at Fairview Early Childhood Center and chairman of an early childhood education study committee for the Farmington district.

Previously, early childhood curriculum was dictated by what teachers at upper levels deemed necessary, Rutter explained, including a lot of structured, "paper and pencil" learning. That has changed, he said.

"People are taking a look at what's appropriate and how we're delivering it to them. Gesell, Piaget, all the theories developed in the '50s and '60s — some of these things finally are becoming clear."

Under the proposal, "paper and pencil" learning would be downplayed, allowing teachers to focus on developmental activities and hands-on experiences for children in all subjects.

THE CHANGES are proposed for kindergartners throughout the district, continuing at both early childhood centers and expanding to 11 elementary schools. This approach was piloted this year at Center Kindergarten programs at both Fairview and Alameda early childhood centers.

According to kindergarten teacher and committee member Barb Bennett, the new, active approach focuses on building a child's self concept, recognizes that play is important to learning.

"We're really talking about involving children in the learning act itself," added assistant superintendent Judith White, who oversees curriculum development in the district. "The kids are involved in finding information through interaction."

The approach is apparently popular among parents in the district, according to enrollment and attendance numbers released Tuesday. Center Kindergarten classes that used the hands-on approach to learning increased from 81 students in the 1987-88 pilot year, to 226 registered for sessions this fall, said Mary Lou Somerville, supervisor at Alameda.

IN REACTION to this trend, school trustees are proposing a third early childhood center be built, along with a new west-side elementary, as part of a fall bond issue.

The issue of kindergarten curriculum was raised in January of 1987, when a recommendation was made to move all kindergartners to early childhood centers in the district. The idea of centralization was hotly contested by several hundred parents, although many agreed the curriculum needed to be changed.

The Center Kindergarten programs were then offered as optional pilot programs with the new curriculum, while the district kept kindergartners open at elementaries.

"One of the things they were saying . . . is, 'If you really believe in the concept, why can't you do it in the regular kindergarten?'," said White. "That's what we've done."

School board trustees heard information about the new curriculum Tuesday and are expected to consider it at a future meeting.

## Kindergarten teachers learn hands-on, creative approach

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

Farmington kindergarten teachers discovered this week how to bring more creative, hands-on learning to their young charges.

The new approach will help them teach play, and discourage "paper and pencil" learning, which has penetrated kindergarten classrooms in recent years.

Seventeen teachers attended a summer workshop to learn about the approach and to physically redesign kindergarten rooms to accommodate the concept. The group began last week by taking the district's 15-year-old philosophy statement for kindergarten education and updating it.

They are expanding on a pilot curriculum used during the past year at

center kindergarten programs in the district. It is the first time kindergarten teachers in the Farmington district have joined together in such a forum, organizers said.

"I just know we've taken a giant step," said Gayle Zimmerer, a teacher at Alameda's central kindergarten and one of two teachers who piloted the new approach at two Farmington early childhood centers this year. "I'm glad the district is so supportive."

ZIMMERER AND Barb Bennett, her counterpart at Fairview Early Childhood Center, taught the summer workshop. Beginning this fall, both will spend their mornings helping teachers implement the program this fall and will continue teaching half-days.

Kindergarten teachers will still have play time and group activities in the

new program, but teachers will also set up "learning centers," in which students will move from one activity to another — all hands-on — in learning their lessons. Teachers will plan these "learning center" lessons around various themes. For example, one week might focus on all aspects of dinosaurs.

Zimmerer suggested the kindergarten room be divided well and include: an art area, a spot for quiet and listening time, construction area for blocks and other building materials, an area for house- and home-related items, a games area and a computer area. She gave teachers tips for storing and marking items.

"Initially, it's a lot of time and a lot of work, but it pays off," Zimmerer added. "A lot of kids have never been given this opportunity and freedom."

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