Syria civil war: Leaders in new plea for massive refugee aid

World leaders have opened a donor conference in London with an urgent plea for billions of pounds in aid for refugees from war-torn Syria.

“There is a critical shortfall in life-saving aid,” said UK Prime Minister David Cameron.

Germany pledged $2.6bn (£1.9bn; €2.3bn) and the UK $1.7bn in new refugee aid.

However, the conference has been overshadowed by the suspension of peace talks in Geneva on Wednesday, and intense fighting on the ground.

A Syrian government offensive, backed by Russian air strikes, is continuing north of Aleppo.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said an estimated 70,000 Syrians fleeing the bombing were moving towards Turkey.

Focus on children

The goal of the donor conference is to raise $9bn (£6.2bn) for Syrian refugees.

Mr Cameron and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon both spoke of the need to get all Syrian refugee children into education within months.

Sixty countries are represented at the conference, including 30 world leaders.

It is the fourth of its kind, focusing on education and jobs for the 4.6 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. Turkey is hosting 2.5 million – the largest number.

Hours before the conference began, peace talks between the Syrian regime and opposition were suspended.

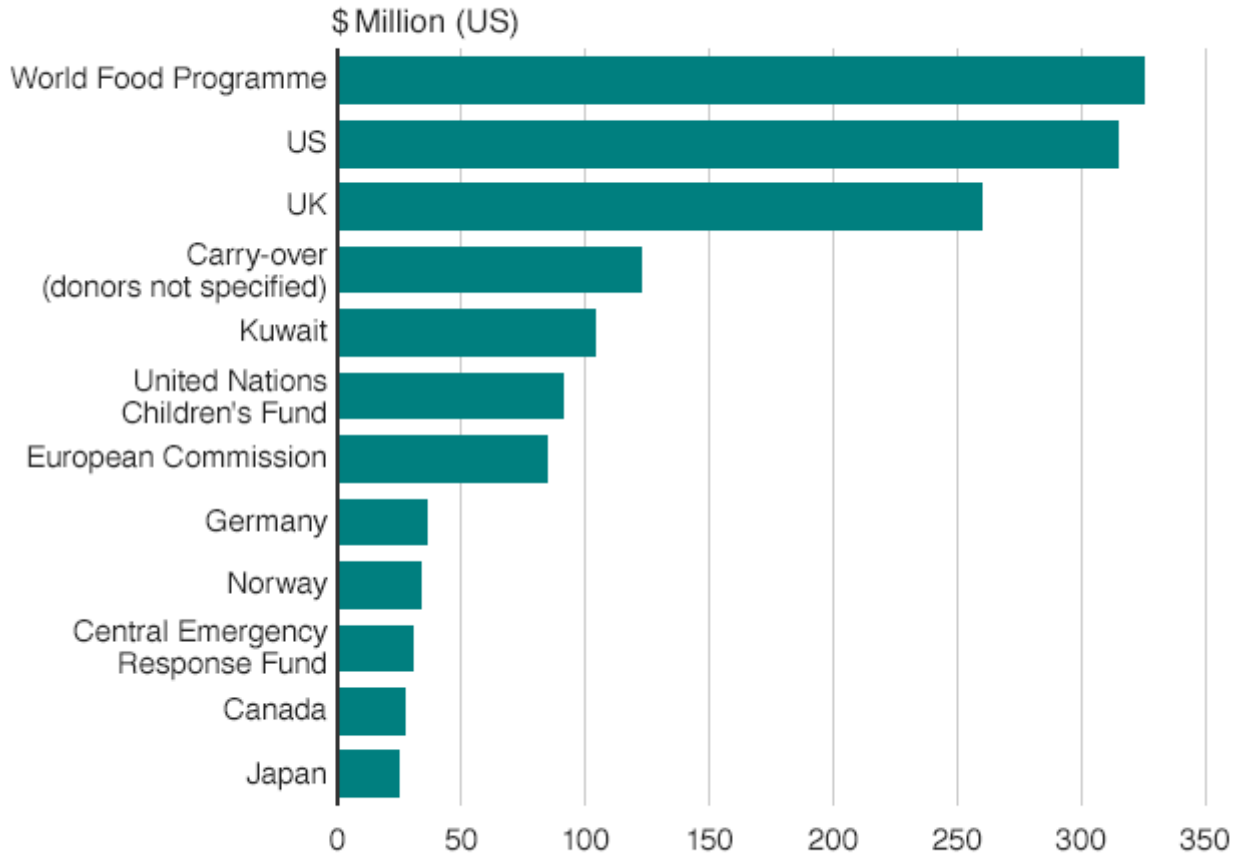
The United Nations-brokered talks, which opened just two days ago, are expected to resume on 25 February. Staffan de Mistura, the UN’s special envoy at the talks, admitted there had been a lack of progress but said that the negotiations had not failed.

UN chief Ban Ki-moon said the talks were “undermined by the continuous lack of sufficient humanitarian access, and by a sudden increase of aerial bombings and military activities within Syria”.

He urged the warring sides to “get back to the table, not to secure more gains on the battlefields”.

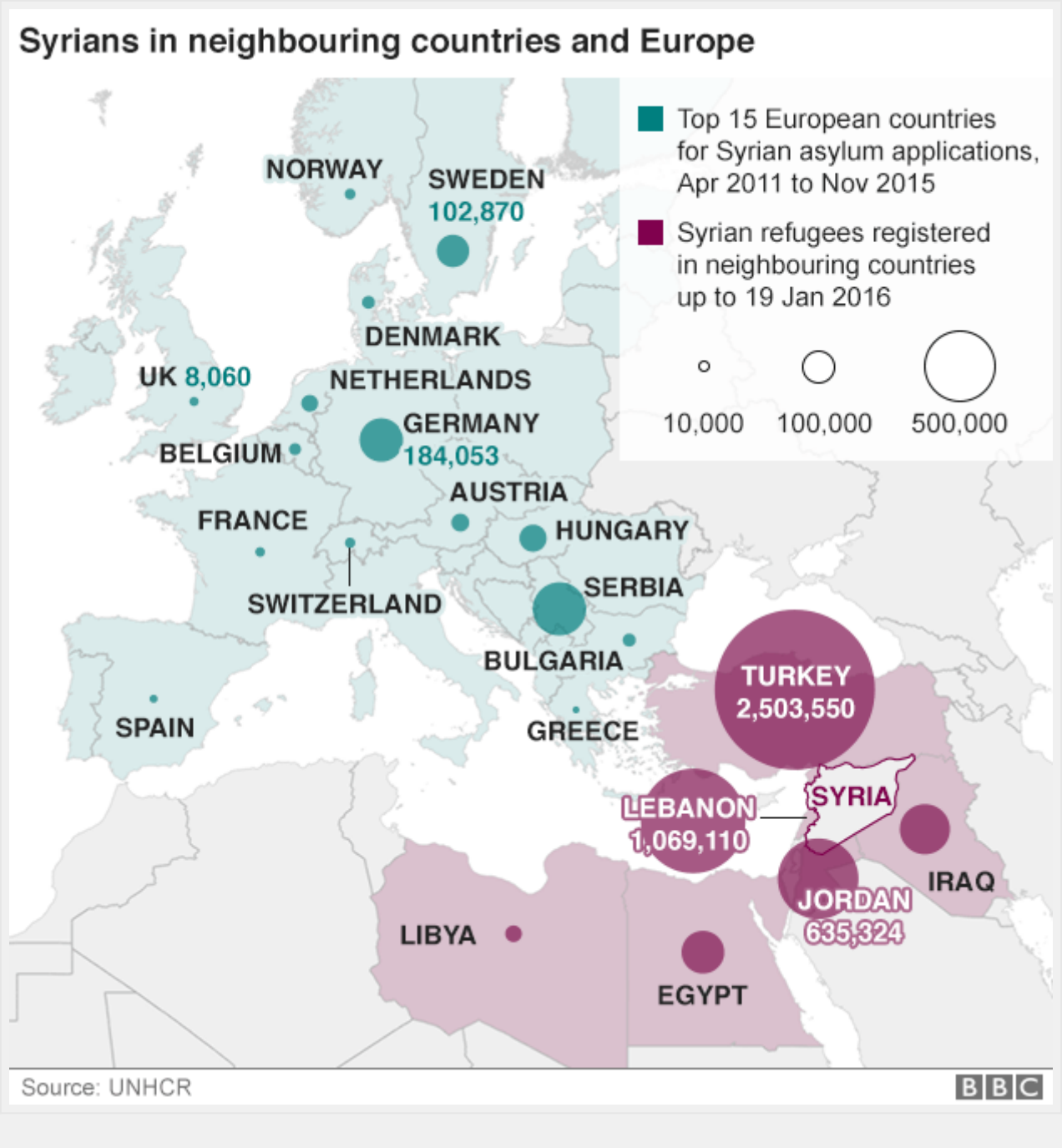
The $9bn being sought on Thursday is made up of a UN appeal for $7.7bn and approximately $1.3bn requested by regional host governments.

Largest Syria Response Plan donors in 2015



Source: UNOCHA FTS

BBC



Part of the reason for the record request is the underfunding of previous appeals. Only 43% of the $2.9bn pledged to the UN's 2015 appeal has so far been funded.

Delegates from Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon said their societies would need long-term support in order to adapt to the influx from Syria, BBC diplomatic correspondent James Robbins reports.

On Monday, officials said the European Union would promise $2.2bn (€2bn) in aid at the conference.

A coalition of more than 90 humanitarian and human rights groups meeting in London on Wednesday – including Amnesty International, Oxfam and the Malala Foundation – called for better access to education and jobs for refugees in Syria and neighbouring states.

The latest round of peace talks broke up amid rebel anger over the continuing Russian bombing around Aleppo.

The air strikes were also criticised by the US, France and Turkey.

- A Russian officer helping Syrian government troops with a new weapons system was killed when

so-called Islamic State (IS) militants fired mortars at a Syrian army garrison on Monday, the Russian Defence Ministry said
- Four Russian Sukhoi Su-35S fighters – a new model delivered to the Russian air force just a few months ago – are now flying combat missions in Syria
- Syrian state TV has shown civilians greeting government troops in a Shia Muslim town north of Aleppo, after the troops pushed rebels back from a key supply route.

Blame game over collapse of Syria talks

Middle East newspapers apportion blame to a variety of sources for the suspension of the third round of peace talks in Geneva.

Ali Ibrahim Mattar in Iran's Arabic-language newspaper al-Vefagh takes aims at Saudi Arabia: "Saudi Arabia wants to make political solutions fail and sabotages any talks, in addition to its support for terrorist groups to destabilise Syria".

In Syria's state-run al-Thawrah daily, Ahmad Hamadah says: "The US Secretary of State [John Kerry] and his aides flock to the Swiss capital… and behind closed doors impede all options for a solution."

Qatar's pro-government al-Rayah newspaper says: "Damascus, Moscow and pro-Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's sectarian militias made the Geneva talks fail from day one. These talks were stillborn."

Nasri al-Sayigh in the pan-Arab leftist Al-Safir daily bemoans the absence of the Syrians themselves – the refugees, displaced and missing – whilst the Saudi pro-government paper al-Watan says "Russian air strikes suspend Geneva 3 until 25 February".

Jordan is hosting 635,000 of the 4.6 million Syrians registered as refugees with the UN. Speaking to the BBC ahead of Thursday's conference, Jordan's King Abdullah said his country was at "boiling point".

More than 250,000 people have died in almost five years of war in Syria.

Eleven million others have fled their homes as forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad and those opposed to his rule battle each other, as well as IS jihadists.

Ershad is relaxed after making 'best decision' in politics
HM Ershad seems to be patting himself on the back after appointing his

brother GM Quader as Co-chairman and Ruhul Amin Howlader as Secretary General of Jatiya Party.

“I did not know that one announcement could cause so much excitement within the party,” said the chairman at a programme in Dhaka on Thursday.

“This might just be the best decision I took in my entire political career.”

“I had been in so much pain. There was no peace of mind… or smiles. I would be worried all the time, what would happen to Jatiya Party… my child when I’m gone.”

“But now I’m relaxed, my child will survive. I will live because of this one decision.”

Ershad was addressing a reception for the newly appointed Quader, his successor, and Howlader at a restaurant in Gulshan.

Criticising former secretary general Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu, he said, “Ruhul Amin was secretary general for 14 years. But he didn’t say a word when I had removed him from the post.”

“That is loyalty… that is love. I made someone else secretary general in his place who shoved me out of my party after I made my brother (GM Quader) co-chairman. Is that even possible?”

The supporters were heard chanting, “No… no… no… Bablu is a traitor … traitor.”

“But I’m forgetting all of this from today, I’ll listen to my brother from now on,” said Ershad as he resumed.

Four policemen withdrawn from duty over death of tea-seller

Four policemen have been withdrawn from duty over the death of a tea-seller from burns after police allegedly attacked him, causing an oil spill from a stove, in Dhaka’s Shah Ali area.

Jasim Uddin Molla, Mirpur Division Additional Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said the withdrawn policemen are two sub-inspectors, an assistant sub-inspector and a constable.

The action was taken hours after the death of tea-seller Babul Matubbor.

Matubbor was rushed to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) after he was brought to Dhaka Medical College Hospital at around 1:30 am on Thursday. He died there later.

The 45-year-old had suffered 90 percent burns.

Matubbor was attacked by policemen who demanded that he give them money, his family has said.

But police claimed he was a drug dealer and had caught fire while trying to flee from a police informer.

Kader Siddique cannot contest Tangail by-polls after HC scraps petition

The High Court has scrapped a petition filed by Kader Siddique, putting an end to his chances of contesting in the Tangail-4 by-polls.

Thursday's verdict also meant there were no legal hurdles to holding the election, the Election Commission's lawyer has said.

The Krishak Sramik Janata League (KSJL) president had filed the petition against the commission's decision to cancel his nomination.

Justices Md Ashfaqul Islam and Zafar Ahmed announced the verdict after ruling that the writ filed by Siddique was not acceptable for the High Court.

Broadcast Law in June: Inu

Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu on Thursday said the draft of a 'Broadcast Law' will be placed at the next session of Parliament in June after getting clearance from Cabinet.
The minister disclosed the information while talking to reporters at the secretariat after a meeting with a UNDP official.
"We will get the draft of the law within next two weeks," Inu said.
After getting the copy of the draft, it will be opened to public for feedback and opinions, he said.
The minister also said the law would come into effect in the light of "National Broadcast Policy 2014", and an independent broadcast commission would also be installed under the new law.
Inu said his ministry was going to arrange a two-day media convention where journalists from across the country are expected to participate.
During the convention, journalists will be urged to play significant roles to save democracy and to work against militancy and terrorism, said the minister.
Earlier, Inu joined a meeting with Resident Representative of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Robert D Watkins.
Inu said UNDP has proposed to train journalists to play a role to deal with earthquake.
The UNDP has also offered to increase the aptitudes of the Community Radios, Inu said.

South Africa brush aside Ireland

South Africa secured ninth-place finish in the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup after they blew away Ireland by **eight wickets** today.

Chasing the paltry total of 186, South African top-order did the job professionally and proficiently in the end. They didn't allow Ireland to come back in the match.

Ireland Under-19s v South Africa Under-19s
South Africa: 187/2 (46.0 over)
Ireland: 185/7 (50.0 over)

Kyle Verreynne was the highest scorer for Proteas with his knock of 77 runs. He was ably supported by Liam Smith with 49.

For Ireland, only Tucker and Dennison took a wicket each, while the rest of the bowlers toiled in vain to stall South Africa.

South Africa lost their second wicket at the cusp of victory when Verrrynne was caught out for a match-winning 77.

His knock ensured Proteas could comfortably reach the target set by Ireland. He faced 109 balls, and smashed seven fours and a huge six to punctuate his innings.

The wicket was too little too late for the Irish camp.

Ireland tasted success after 26 overs when they finally managed to break the opening stand that yielded 104 runs when Smith was sent back for 49 runs.

Smith managed his innings well, faced 86 balls and struck three fours and a six during his stay at the crease.

South Africa were placed in a comfortable position in the context of the chase, and the game is now for them to lose.

Proteas began the chase of 186 with a plan in mind, and both the openers played sensibly to deny the Irish bowlers early.

South African opening stand reached 84 in 22 overs, with both Smith and Verreynne on 42.

Earlier, a great show with the ball enabled South Africa to restrict Ireland to a paltry total of 185 runs in 50 overs in the ninth place play-off match of the ICC U19 CWC in Bangladesh.

Lorcan Tucker was the savior for the Irish on a miserable day, and he carried his bat to score 77 from 98 balls with seven fours and a six. He stood his ground when wickets fell all around him.

For the Proteas, Galiem and Ludick took two wickets each.

South Africa had their opponents down on the mat at 71 for five, but the Irish lower-order offered stiff resistance and enabled their side to come back in the game.

Fiachra Tucker was the seventh wicket to fall for Ireland, when Ludick got his second wicket of the match in the 46 th over. Tucker hung around for half an hour, managed 20 useful runs for his team.

His wicket fell at a decisive moment when Ireland needed some quick runs in the death overs.

Aaron Gillespie fell in the 37th over, and he was run out after playing 41 balls for 12 runs when the chips were down for the Irish lads.

South Africa kept tightening the screws on Ireland by executing their bowling plans extremely well.

South Africa took control of the ninth place play-off match against Ireland by removing the Irish top-order before the halfway stage at Cox's Bazar.

Ireland lost their fifth wicket, and with it the chance of salvaging their innings when William McClintock was caught for 14.

The twenty-odd runs, after the fall of the fourth wicket pulled back the reins somewhat, but South Africa's Sipamla struck at the worst possible time for the Irish.

Irish batsmen found boundaries hard to come by, but failed to keep the scoreboard ticking with the ones and twos, and found themselves in a rut of their own making.

Adam Dennison became the fourth Irish batsman to fall, when Willem Ludick struck in the 17 th over. Dennison scored 16 from 39 balls, and got bogged down at the crease.

South Africa piled on the pressure with tight spells, and Ireland looked vulnerable, their batsman playing too many dot balls in a row.

Gary McClintock fell in the 11th over, the third wicket down for the sorry Irish camp today. With only 36 on the board, they are reeling for sure.

Dayyaan Galiem took his second wicket of the day when he found McClintock in front of the stumps after the batsman scored six runs. Umpire didn't have a tough decision here.

Ireland lost their second batsman early, in the seventh over as the Proteas new-ball bowlers were immaculate in their length. Jack Tector managed 18 from 25 balls, but lacked the temperament to see out the difficult times.

South Africa got their first breakthrough in the sixth over, and their bowlers were rewarded for their persistence. Andrew Austin scored four runs from 11 balls, and was sent back by Wiaan Mulder.

Ireland captain Tector won the toss and decided to bat first against South Africa led by Tony de Zorzi in the ninth place play-off match of the ICC U19 CWC 2016.

Teams

South Africa U19: Tony de Zorzi (capt), Ziyaad Abrahams, Dean Foxcroft, Dayyaan Galiem, Willie Ludick, Wandile Makwethu, Conner McKerr, Rivaldo Moonsamy, Wiaan Mulder, Luke Philander, Farhaan Sayanvala, Lutho Sipamla, Liam Smith, Kyle Verreynne, Sean Whitehead.

Ireland U19: Jack Tector (capt), Rory Anders, Andrew Austin, Varun Chopra, Adam Dennison, Stephen Doheny, Aaron Gillespie, Josh Little, Gary McClintock, William McClintock, Tom Stanton, Harry Tector, Fiachra Tucker, Lorcan Tucker, Ben White.

Tea-seller burnt in 'police attack' dies in Dhaka hospital

A tea-seller in Dhaka has died from burns after police allegedly attacked him, causing an oil spill from a stove.

Babul Matubbor, of Mirpur's Shah Ali area, was rushed to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) after he was brought to Dhaka Medical College Hospital at around 1:30am Thursday.

The 45-year-old had suffered 90% burns, said Burn Unit doctor Partha Sankar Pal.

Babul was attacked by policemen who demanded that he give them money, his family has said.

But police claimed Babul was a drug dealer who had burnt himself while trying to run away from them.

Babul lived in a house near his tea-shop at Mirpur-1 Gudaraghat, his daughter-in-law Moni Begum told bdnews24.com.

She said two women sold marijuana in front of Babul's shop. "Police harassed us in various ways when my father-in-law complained about them."

A couple of policemen tried to take Babul away to Shah Ali Police Station at noon on Wednesday, she said.

"They came to extort money from him at night. But when he refused to pay up, several of them wearing police uniforms hit the stove in the shop with their batons."

Babul's jacket caught fire when oil splashed out of the stove, she said.

"I was there … I saw everything with my own eyes."

Meanwhile, Shah Ali Police Station OC AKM Shahin Mondol said, "Babul is a drug dealer. He tried to run away when our source Delwar went to his shop at night. His body then caught fire from the stove."

"A police team went there after learning of the fire," he said, brushing aside allegations of extortion.

AL MP Latif sued for distorting Bangabandhu's portrait

MA Latif, the Awami League lawmaker from Chittagong-11 constituency, has been sued for distorting the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Saifuddin Ahmed Robi, a former central committee member of AL's youth front Jubo League, filed the Tk 1,000 crore defamation suit with Chittagong Metropolitan Magistrate's Court today, reports the Bangla daily Prothom Alo.

Taking the case into cognisance, Judge Farid Ahmed ordered an additional deputy police

commissioner to investigate the matter and submit the report by the next 15 days.

According to the case statement, Latif has made a poster in which he has put his head on the portrait of Bangabandhu.

“The AL lawmaker has mocked the father of the nation by this act. I have lodged the case as a conscious citizen of the country,” Robi said.

Obama decries anti-Muslim rhetoric on first mosque visit

Barack Obama offered an impassioned rebuttal of “inexcusable” Republican election rhetoric against Muslims Wednesday, on his first trip to an American mosque since becoming president seven years ago.

Obama, whose grandfather converted to Islam, made the short trip to the Islamic Society of Baltimore to call on Americans not to be “bystanders to bigotry.”

Invoking the Prophet Mohammed and hailing the tolerance shown by American political icons from Thomas Jefferson to Dwight Eisenhower, Obama hit out at anti-Islamic sentiment that is “not who we are.”

“We’ve heard inexcusable political rhetoric against Muslim-Americans that has no place in our country,” he said, lauding Muslim-Americans as sports heroes, entrepreneurs and the architect who fashioned Chicago’s dizzying skyline.

His comments came as a shrill election debate has sullied America’s image abroad, and as jihadist attacks in San Bernardino and Philadelphia threatened to shatter post-9/11 religious solidarity at home.

Six days after the 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, then president George W. Bush visited the Islamic Center of Washington, declaring “Islam is peace.”

Today, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has wooed conservative voters by demanding a ban on Muslim immigrants, while frontrunner Ted Cruz has advocated Christian-only admissions and championed “Judeo-Christian values.”



Copies of the Quran are seen on reserved chairs prior to a speech by US President Barack Obama at the Islamic Society of Baltimore on February 3, 2016 in Windsor Mill, Maryland (AFP Photo/Mandel Ngan)

Obama took on such comments, and asked Christians to see “an attack on one faith is an attack on all our faiths.”

He also criticized the media and Hollywood, which he said portrayed Muslims in a narrow way.

“Our television shows should have Muslim characters that are unrelated to national security,” he said.

‘Thank you’

Obama has visited mosques in Malaysia, Indonesia and Egypt as president, but this was his first visit to one of America’s 2,000-plus places of Islamic worship.

In 2009, a freshly elected Obama traveled to Cairo to call for a “new beginning” with the Muslim world.

Much of Obama’s foreign policy agenda has focused on improving ties with Muslim nations, from making a nuclear deal with Iran to ending wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But the effort has been stymied by continued confrontation with jihadist groups and military strikes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.

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The president offered “two words that Muslim-Americans don’t hear often enough, and that is ‘thank you’.”

But he also called on Muslims to help tackle radicalization.

“How do we defend ourselves against organizations that are bent on killing innocents?” he asked.

“It can’t be the work of any one faith alone. It can’t be just a burden on the Muslim community, although the Muslim community has to play a role.”

That message is a vexed one for members of the Muslim community, including audience member Riham Osman, who works for the Muslim Public Affairs Council, an advocacy group.

“I know national security will come up in the speech just because of the climate of today,” she said ahead of Obama’s remarks.

“It does upset me a little bit that it is his first time coming to visit a mosque, and there will be kids there who have grown up in this post 9/11 era and their faith is constantly linked to national security and extremism.”

Around 49 percent of all Americans think “at least some” US Muslims hold anti-American sentiments, according to a Pew Research Center poll released Wednesday.

The United States is home to around 3.3 million Muslims.

Around 81 Muslim-Americans were involved in violent extremist plots in 2015, according to the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security.

Transport owners to be punished for road crashes: Quader

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader today held transport owners responsible for road crashes and indiscipline in the sector.

“They (owners) too are responsible for road crashes. That’s why we are going to bring them under purview of punishment,” he told reporters while visiting a mobile court at Dhaka’s Agargaon.

“We have drafted a new road transport law. There, transport owners will be brought to book for road crashes and indiscipline in the sector,” Quader told reporters.

As per the existing Road Transport Act, only drivers are held responsible and punished also for road accidents and indiscipline in public transport sector, he said.

Loss of lives in road crashes has become a nightmare for Bangladesh. Last year alone, more than 8,500 people were killed in road crashes throughout the country.

On the note of jam in the Dhaka, Quader underscored the need for collective efforts of city

corporations, public works ministry and police department to reduce the plight of commuters.