

BD's air cargo sector takes flight, Biman leads way

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Dhaka : Bangladesh's air cargo industry is undergoing a dramatic transformation, with national airline Biman Bangladesh Airlines at the forefront of a growth surge that is elevating the country's role in global logistics.

The country's cargo volumes are surging—from approximately 400,000 tons in 2019 to forecasts crossing 1.1 million tons by 2041—driven by booming garment exports and limited sea-transport options. Experts predict the sector could double in size over the next five years if policy, pricing, and services improve.

In response, the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), under the leadership of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, is accelerating upgrades:

(1) Launching dedicated cargo operations at regional hubs like Sylhet,

Chattogram, Saidpur, and Lalmonirhat

(2) Staffing enhancements and operational cost reductions for air cargo

Crucially, with India's sudden halt on transshipment via Kolkata and Delhi, Bangladesh is building self-sufficiency in freight transport—an effort branded as a major policy pivot.

Infrastructure overhaul

The centerpiece: the soon-to-open third terminal at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA). Scheduled for full operations by late 2025, this facility will add 36,000m² to cargo capacity—tripling current handling—and transform operations across the region.

Meanwhile, Sylhet's Osmani Airport began dedicated cargo flights in April, shifting essential exports like garments—60 tons in the first flight—to new international routes. Chattogram and other regional airports are coming online soon, aiming to reduce pressure on Dhaka and decentralize logistics.

Biman's dual role as carrier, ground-handler

While Biman is expanding its cargo fleet with plans to acquire two Airbus A350F freighters, its role on the ground is just as pivotal. As the sole ground-handling service provider in Bangladesh, Biman is central to the country's freight turnaround:

(1) Over 400 new handlers have been added, bringing total ground crew at HSIA to more than 700.

(2) Biman has deployed 381 advanced cargo-handling machines, including forklifts, trolleys, and security scanners.

(3) It currently services 48 foreign airlines and managed over 2,100 charter flights last year.

(4) Regional hubs like Sylhet and Chattogram are now supported by Biman teams and equipment, enabling round-the-clock freighter operations.

(5) It also holds RA3 and ACC3 certifications, ensuring cargo compliance with EU and UK security standards.

With this blend of air and ground investment, Biman is positioning itself as a logistics leader-not just a national carrier.

Cost, service reforms

Price competitiveness is key. HSIA had been charging high ground-handling fees (up to 16 cents/kg), compared to ~4-5 cents/kg in Indian airports-and freight costs to Europe were nearly double.

In response, CAAB and Biman are revising tariff structures and establishing a task force via the Ministry of Civil Aviation, aiming for streamlined operations and cost reductions.

New era unfolds

Export resilience: By building its own freight capacity, Bangladesh avoids shipping disruptions from neighboring policies.

Economic uplift: Faster, cheaper air exports could significantly boost GDP and job creation, with growing potential for HSIA's marketplace.

Regional logistics hub: With diversified airports, enhanced infrastructure, and intent to attract global carriers, Bangladesh is emerging as a serious South Asian cargo node.