

IATA forecasts 2.6pc air cargo growth in 2026

- A Monitor Report

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Lima : Global air cargo demand is expected to grow at a steadier pace of 2.6 percent in 2026, with the Asia-Pacific region continuing to lead the expansion, according to new projections from the International Air Transport Association.

Speaking at the World Cargo Symposium in Lima, Peru, IATA's Head of Industry Analysis Julia Seiermann highlighted that the outlook reflects the sector's resilience following solid performance last year. In 2025, cargo demand - measured in cargo ton-kilometers (CTK) - rose by 3.4 percent, while capacity, tracked through available cargo ton-kilometers (ACTK), increased slightly more at 3.7 percent.

Regional trends show Asia-Pacific maintaining its position as the primary growth driver. The region recorded an 8.4 percent increase in cargo demand in 2025 and is projected to expand by around 6 percent this year. Europe is also expected to contribute to growth, though at a

more modest pace, with forecasts pointing to about 2 percent after achieving 2.9 percent last year.

Other regions present a more mixed picture. Africa, which saw a 6 percent rise in 2025, is expected to slow to roughly 2 percent growth. Latin America is also forecast to grow by about 2 percent, following a 2.3 percent increase last year.

In contrast, the Middle East is likely to see no growth in 2026 after a marginal 0.3 percent rise previously, reflecting ongoing regional tensions. North America remains under pressure as well, with trade tariffs continuing to weigh on demand. The region experienced a 1.3 percent contraction last year, though the decline is expected to ease to around 0.5 percent this year.

Despite geopolitical uncertainties and a projected slowdown in global trade, IATA believes air cargo will remain relatively robust. Seiermann noted that the sector proved its adaptability in 2025 by adjusting supply chains - accelerating shipments to the United States ahead of tariff hikes, shifting trade routes, and supporting rising demand for AI-related products and e-commerce.

Last year, global trade expanded by 2.4 percent, while the global economy grew by 3.2 percent, with air cargo playing a key role in sustaining that momentum.

Looking ahead, the industry is expected to remain a vital component of global trade, particularly as businesses navigate ongoing volatility and continued growth in technology-driven and online retail sectors.