

## **Saudia Cargo strengthens role in BD with capacity, innovations, sustainability**

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Dhaka : With over three decades of operations in Bangladesh, Saudia Cargo has established itself as a dominant force in the country's air freight sector, carrying the highest share of goods out of Dhaka and connecting Bangladeshi exports to key global markets.

In an interview with The Bangladesh Monitor, Abeeda Rahman, General Manager-Commercial, First Forwarding Ltd (GSA of Saudia Cargo in Bangladesh), discussed the airline's contribution to the economy, its operational strengths, industry challenges, and long-term sustainability commitments.

Trailblazer in cargo aviation

Rahman, who began her aviation career in 2004, has spent 21 years serving Saudia Cargo. She holds the distinction of being the first female

country head of a cargo airline in Bangladesh's trade sector-a groundbreaking achievement in a traditionally male-dominated industry.

Her leadership has helped position Saudia Cargo not just as the largest air freight operator in Bangladesh, but also as a trusted partner to exporters navigating global markets.

### Stronghold in air cargo ops

Saudia Cargo has been operating in Bangladesh for more than 30 years, offering an extensive global network that spans four continents, nearly 100 airports, and 250 international destinations. With 23 wide-body flights a week from Dhaka, the airline handles more than 500 tons of cargo capacity weekly-making it the largest carrier of air freight out of the country.

"Saudia Cargo's strength lies in its global reach and frequency," Rahman said. "Our wide-body fleet connects Bangladesh to Europe, the US, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East with ample space for garments, perishables, and other cargo."



The carrier is also a member of the SkyTeam Cargo Alliance, the largest global cargo alliance with 12 airlines, offering broader connectivity and reliability to customers worldwide.

#### Strategic role of BD

Bangladesh occupies a significant place in Saudia Cargo's global network. Leveraging its hub in Saudi Arabia, the airline acts as a bridge between East and West.

"Our hub positioning gives us the flexibility to move cargo with minimal ground handling time, ensuring efficiency and reliability for Bangladeshi exporters," Rahman explained.

Garments, perishables drive exports

Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector-the backbone of the economy-relies heavily on Saudia Cargo's services. The airline plays a crucial role in transporting apparel swiftly to major markets in Europe, the US, and Africa.

"Exporters trust Saudia for timely delivery and compliance with international standards, which are critical in the fast-paced fashion supply chain," Rahman said.

Additionally, Saudia Cargo is a leading carrier for perishables, particularly fresh produce bound for Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. With state-of-the-art cold chain solutions, the airline ensures quality and freshness are maintained throughout transit.

#### Differentiation through capacity, connectivity

According to Rahman, Saudia Cargo distinguishes itself from other international carriers in Bangladesh through sheer capacity and network coverage. "Operating three daily wide-body flights and offering extensive connections via Saudi hubs, we ensure prompt and on-time service with immediate onward connectivity to Europe, USA, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East," she said.

This, coupled with a robust trucking service in Europe, positions Saudia as the go-to carrier for exporters handling garments, perishables, courier shipments, and high-value goods.

#### Post-pandemic cargo demand

The pandemic reshaped logistics worldwide, and Bangladesh was no exception. Rahman highlighted that air cargo demand has surged in the post-pandemic landscape as buyers increasingly favor quick and efficient transportation. "Speed-to-market has become more important than ever, and air freight is now a preferred choice for global buyers," she noted.

#### Digital transformation in cargo services

To meet evolving customer needs, Saudia Cargo has rolled out new digital solutions in Bangladesh, including e-air waybills, e-booking systems, and an upgraded online tracking platform. These tools allow exporters to book faster, manage shipments seamlessly, and receive instant post-flight updates.



"These innovations enhance efficiency and align Bangladesh's exporters with international best practices," Rahman added.

### Sustainability commitments

While Bangladesh has yet to see major localized sustainability initiatives from Saudia Cargo, Rahman pointed to the airline's strong global sustainability agenda. Key initiatives include:

Carbon-Neutral Flights between Saudi Arabia and the UK during the 2022 Sabic London E-Prix.

Adoption of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) to reduce emissions.

The Green Points Program, which rewards customers for sustainable

choices.

The In-Flight Sustainability Lab, the first of its kind globally.

Recognition at the 2022 Aviation Business Awards in Dubai for sustainability leadership.

"These initiatives reflect our commitment to reducing aviation's environmental footprint while encouraging customers to join the journey," Rahman said.

Challenges in Bangladesh's cargo sector

Despite its growth, Bangladesh's logistics sector faces several hurdles. Rahman identified key issues:

n Airport congestion and inadequate cargo facilities at Dhaka.

Capacity and rate volatility due to sudden flight downgrades and charter disruptions.

Operational inefficiencies, including manual processes and delays in documentation.

Infrastructure gaps, with overreliance on costly road transport and underutilization of ports like Mongla and Payra.

Policy execution bottlenecks, with fragmented governance slowing logistics reforms.

"These challenges impact predictability and efficiency," Rahman emphasized. "Saudia continues to work closely with stakeholders to address these issues while maintaining reliable service for exporters."

Looking ahead

As Bangladesh expands its export basket beyond garments, Saudia Cargo aims to deepen its role as a logistics partner. With unmatched cargo capacity, digital upgrades, and sustainability initiatives, the airline is well-positioned to support the country's evolving trade needs.

"Saudia Cargo is not just a carrier-it is a partner in Bangladesh's economic growth story," Rahman concluded. "Our goal is to connect Bangladesh to the world with reliability, innovation, and care."

