

Middle East air chaos: Regional conflict grounds flights worldwide including BD

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Dhaka: The war triggered by coordinated strikes by the United States and Israel on Iran on February 28 has rapidly spilled into the region's civil aviation sector. After the attacks and ensuing missile exchanges, airspace closures and security concerns have led to widespread flight cancellations, rerouting and delays across the Middle East and beyond — marking one of the most disruptive periods for global aviation since the Covid-19 pandemic.

Major Gulf hubs including Dubai International Airport, Zayed International Airport, and Hamad International Airport saw operations suspended or severely restricted as countries closed or limited their airspace for safety reasons.

An aviation industry analysis also highlights a growing insurance crisis, as airlines face financial losses from cancellations and reroutes that are

not fully covered under current policies, deepening the economic impact of the conflict on the travel sector.

Bangladesh flights: cancellations, stranded passengers, operational hits

Dhaka and Chattogram: Dozens of flights cancelled

From Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) in Dhaka, at least 102 flights to and from Gulf destinations have been cancelled over a three-day period since the conflict escalated, according to airport officials. These include both international carriers and Bangladeshi airlines operating routes to Dubai, Doha, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle Eastern cities.

Earlier reports showed 54 flights were cancelled from Dhaka over two days as several Middle Eastern countries closed or restricted their skies amid the ongoing crisis — leaving passengers facing uncertainty and hardship.

At Hazrat Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram, at least 20-25 flights were cancelled over recent days due to the evolving situation. Some services, like SalamAir flights from Muscat, did operate as routes began resuming, but uncertainty remains high.

Flights gradually resuming to/from Bangladesh

Despite the widespread disruption, several services linking Bangladesh with key Gulf destinations have gradually resumed as partial airspace access was restored.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines resumed select Saudi Arabia-bound flights, including Dhaka-Madinah (BG-337) and Dhaka-Jeddah (BG-335) after earlier suspensions. The Dhaka-Riyadh (BG-339) service was also cleared to operate following schedule adjustments.

From Chattogram, Biman's BG-135 Jeddah-bound flight departed after remaining grounded during peak disruption days.

US-Bangla Airlines reinstated flights to Riyadh, Jeddah, and Muscat, prioritizing high-demand labor routes.

SalamAir's Muscat-Chattogram (OV-403) flight successfully operated,

marking one of the earliest restored regional connections.

However, flights to destinations such as Doha, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi remain subject to sudden changes depending on airspace advisories and security assessments.

Stranded passengers, operational challenges

Thousands of travelers — including many Bangladeshi migrant workers heading to Gulf destinations — were left stranded at Dhaka and Chattogram airports as flights were cut and schedules shifted without much notice.

Temporary accommodation and government monitoring of rescheduled flights have been arranged in some cases. While the resumption of select services has eased pressure, airport officials say backlogs remain.

What's driving these disruptions?

The closures and cancellations stem primarily from:

- Airspace shutdowns by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Jordan in the wake of retaliatory missile strikes and security threats over civilian routes.
- Safety advisories from international aviation authorities warning of elevated risks in Middle Eastern skies, leading airlines to suspend or reroute flights.
- Ripple effects across Europe-Asia connections, as Gulf carriers normally carry huge volumes of traffic between continents — and closures force longer routes or suspensions.

Long-term outlook: routes, costs, passenger confidence

Analysts say that even if direct hostilities ease, air travel disruption could linger due to:

- Longer flight paths around closed airspace, increasing fuel use and flight costs.
- Higher insurance and war-risk premiums discouraging airlines from resuming full schedules until long-term stability returns.
- Potential passenger hesitation, which could reduce bookings and slow recovery for carriers that rely on Middle Eastern hub networks.

For Bangladesh, which depends on Gulf connections for migrant travel, business trips, and Hajj/Umrah pilgrimages, these disruptions pose a direct challenge to its aviation sector and travelers alike. Continued diplomatic efforts and coordination with aviation authorities will be crucial to restoring normal flight operations — even as limited resumptions offer cautious optimism.

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