

## Middle East crisis pushes up air cargo rates, cuts export capacity

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**Dhaka: The ongoing crisis in the Middle East has significantly disrupted air cargo operations from Bangladesh, leading to a sharp spike in freight rates and a steep drop in export capacity over the past two weeks.**

Industry insiders say the limited cargo space and flight disruptions have driven freight charges to double and, in some cases, nearly triple. The disruptions have also extended delivery times for shipments to key export markets.

Data from the International Air Express Association of Bangladesh (IAEAB) show that freight rates to European destinations have risen dramatically. Airlines that previously charged around \$2 to \$2.20 per kilogram are now asking between \$5.50 and \$6 per kg due to surging demand and reduced capacity.

Shipments to the United States have also become more expensive. Rates that once ranged from \$4.50 to \$5 per kg have climbed to approximately \$7 to \$8 per kg, according to industry data.

IAEAB President Kabir Ahmed said cargo operations have been heavily affected by the disruption of flights across the Middle East region.

“Normally, about 600 to 700 tonnes of cargo are handled daily. That volume has now dropped to around 300 to 350 tonnes,” he said. “Earlier shipments could be moved within two to three days, but now it is taking six to seven days. Cargo is also piling up at the airport, creating space constraints.”

Ahmed warned that the current situation may continue for at least another two weeks. However, if the crisis persists, the pressure on Bangladesh’s export logistics could intensify further.

Typically, around 60 percent of Bangladesh’s air cargo exports are routed through major Middle Eastern transit hubs such as Dubai and Doha. However, nearly half of the flights to those destinations have been suspended, according to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.

Airport sources said disruptions on Middle East routes began on February 28, and by March 15 the number of cancelled flights had reached 500.

Several major regional airlines—including Emirates, Etihad Airways, Flydubai, Air Arabia, Qatar Airways, Gulf Air, and Saudia—have suspended numerous flights.

The disruption has been further compounded by the suspension of several Middle East routes by Biman Bangladesh Airlines, which typically carries a large share of cargo in passenger aircraft bellies.

Bangladesh also lacks direct cargo or passenger flights to Europe and the United States, making exporters heavily dependent on transit hubs in the Middle East.

As a result, airlines operating alternative routes that bypass the region—including Turkish Airlines, Malaysia Airlines, Thai Airways, Cathay Pacific, and Singapore Airlines—have increased their freight charges.

Europe accounts for about 56 percent of Bangladesh’s air cargo exports, while roughly 22 percent is destined for the United States.

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