

Passengers suffer as trolley shortage worsens amid flight schedule disruptions

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Dhaka: Passengers arriving at Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport are facing severe hardship this winter due to an acute shortage of luggage trolleys, exacerbated by widespread flight schedule disruptions.

Many passengers report waiting a maximum of two hours to obtain a trolley after collecting their baggage, particularly during the early morning hours when international arrivals peak.

Airport authorities, however, claim the crisis is not due to an actual shortage of trolleys but rather the congestion caused by winter fog and disrupted flight schedules. Aviation insiders argue that the recent downgrade of the Instrument Landing System (ILS) category has further intensified the problem.

Group Captain Ragib Samad, executive director of the concerned agency at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, said that dense fog and adverse weather conditions are causing multiple delayed flights to land simultaneously in the morning. "When flights arrive late, several aircraft end up landing at the same time. This results in a sudden surge of passengers in the terminal, delaying baggage processing and passenger clearance," he said.

He explained that the airport currently has only eight baggage belts, and a new flight's luggage cannot be unloaded until a belt is completely cleared. "When 13 to 15 flights arrive together, passengers naturally face long waits for their baggage," he added.

The delay has a direct impact on trolley availability. Many passengers seek trolleys before collecting baggage, but those used by passengers from earlier flights are not returned quickly enough for reuse. Although Dhaka airport has around 3,700 trolleys in total for arrivals and departures, managing peak-hour pressure has become difficult.

According to Ragib Samad, congestion is highest from early morning until around 2:00-2:30 pm, after which the situation gradually improves as flight schedules normalize. To ease the pressure, 100 additional trolleys have been brought from Chattogram, and those under maintenance have been put back into service.

Experts point to the downgrade of the ILS at Dhaka airport as a key factor. Due to reduced runway visibility during heavy fog, many flights are being diverted to Kolkata, Sylhet, or Chattogram, disrupting airline schedules. When weather improves, multiple flights arrive in quick succession, creating congestion.

CAAB sources said the runway lighting system was damaged on October 29 during a Thai Airways landing, preventing the airport from maintaining ILS Category II standards. As a result, the airport is currently operating under Category I, which requires higher visibility for landing.

Aviation sources say the indirect consequence of this technical setback is flight congestion, passenger pressure, and ultimately, the severe trolley shortage now troubling travelers.