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UPS, FedEx ground MD-11 cargo jets after fatal crash in Louisville

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Dhaka: Logistics giants UPS and FedEx have temporarily grounded their fleets of McDonnell Douglas MD-11 cargo aircraft following a deadly crash involving one of UPS's planes in Louisville, Kentucky, earlier this week that claimed at least 14 lives.

The UPS freighter went down shortly after takeoff from Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport on November 4, bursting into flames upon impact. Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg confirmed the death toll in a post on X on November 7.

Both cargo carriers — among the largest in the world — announced they were suspending operations of the MD-11 jets "out of an abundance of caution." According to company data, FedEx operates 28 MD-11s, while UPS has 27, representing about 9 percent of its total fleet.

UPS said the grounding was carried out following advice from the aircraft manufacturer. Boeing, which took over the MD-11 program through its 1997 merger with McDonnell Douglas, said it had recommended the suspension and was coordinating with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as investigations continue.

“This recommendation was made in an abundance of caution,” a Boeing spokesperson said.

Production of the MD-11 ended in 2000, and the model was retired from passenger service in 2014, though it remains widely used for freight operations.

FedEx, which operates a total of about 700 aircraft, said it was implementing contingency measures to maintain service continuity. Any prolonged grounding could still have ripple effects across global supply chains, given both carriers’ central roles in transporting goods for major retailers such as Amazon, Walmart, and Target, as well as the US Postal Service.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is leading the probe into the accident involving the 34-year-old freighter. Preliminary findings show the aircraft climbed to roughly 100 feet (30 meters) before losing control and crashing near the runway, destroying two nearby businesses.

Investigators said one of the plane’s three engines detached from the left wing during takeoff. NTSB board member Todd Inman said that cockpit recordings captured a warning alarm just 37 seconds after the pilots initiated takeoff thrust. The crew reportedly struggled to regain control before impact.

A preliminary report is expected within 30 days, officials said.

The last fatal UPS air accident occurred in August 2013, when an Airbus A300 crashed while approaching Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport in Alabama, killing both crew members.

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