

AirAsia X eyes Istanbul as new hub for European operations

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Dhaka: Malaysian long-haul low-cost carrier AirAsia X is pivoting its intercontinental strategy toward Turkey, targeting Istanbul as a new hub for European operations after geopolitical tensions derailed its earlier Gulf plans.

Capital A chief executive Tony Fernandes announced the shift at a press conference, saying the airline is close to finalizing a partnership with a major Turkish carrier.

"We're about to do a partnership with a very large Turkish airline, which will give us a huge European network," the CEO said.

Network plans originally designed for Bahrain International Airport are now being trialed in Istanbul. AirAsia X had previously planned to use Bahrain as a fifth-freedom connecting hub, with services to London

Gatwick launching from June 26 and up to 100 aircraft based there.

However, the airport remains closed to commercial traffic amid the risk of Iranian strikes. Although the airline continues to sell tickets on the Kuala Lumpur-Bahrain-London Gatwick fifth-freedom route.

Earlier, in a LinkedIn post on March 16, Fernandes noted demand for travel to Europe via Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan had strengthened amid the ongoing conflict.

He added the airline would manage higher fuel costs through revenue optimization and cost controls to keep fares low.

AirAsia X expects to return most of its stored aircraft to service by the end of April 2026 to improve operational reliability.

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