

MUMBAI AIRPORT FREIGHTER BAN

Air cargo agents warn of 'severe' trade disruption

DEEPAK PATEL

New Delhi, 6 May

The decision of the Mumbai International Airport Limited (Mial) to discontinue cargo flight operations from August 16 could "severely" impact the country's export-import (Exim) trade by driving up freight rates and causing delays in delivery, warned the Air Cargo Agents Association of India (ACAAI) in a letter to the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA).

The Adani group-led Mial operates the Mumbai airport, which is the second-largest in the country after Delhi in terms of international air cargo handling. Located in India's financial capital, the airport manages around 28 per cent of the nation's total international air cargo volume.

In mid-April, the airport operator informed aviation stakeholders that cargo flights will not operate at Mumbai airport from August 16 due to "multiple airside works",

including the construction of a new taxiway for Runway 14/32.

Navi Mumbai airport, the city's second airport being developed by a Mial subsidiary, is scheduled to commence operations in June.

In its letter to the MoCA dated April 30, 2025, the ACAAI stated: "The number of freighters has already been dismally low at all Indian airports, including at Mumbai airport, and stopping them (from August 16) would make a severe dent in the air cargo trade in Mumbai. Freight rates, already high, would skyrocket further. Finding alternative routes would not only prolong the delivery time but also inflate the cost."

The ACAAI accused Mial of going "overboard" as it took the decision to discontinue cargo flights "unilaterally" without consulting stakeholders such as airlines or air cargo agents.

The association asked the MoCA to quickly intervene by



HANDLING CAPACITY

Cargo handled at Mumbai airport (in tonnes)

	FY25	% chg Y-o-Y
Domestic	235,143	1.5
International	654,756	10.7

Source: Airports Authority of India

issuing a directive to Mial to withdraw its decision, "failing which India's Exim trade would be severely hit and exporters/importers of other countries would avoid business with India, especially Mumbai airport".

"Indian Exim trade will lose to global competition," stated the ACAAI. Mial's directive to discontinue cargo flights does not mention a date of their "resumption", which has fur-

ther increased the ACAAI's anxiety. *Business Standard* has reviewed a copy of the association's letter.

In response to the newspaper's queries on this matter, Mial stated the recent "adjustments" to cargo operations at the Mumbai airport have followed a "transparent, consultative and regulator-driven" process and it has not acted "unilaterally".

The construction of a par-

allel taxiway for Runway 14/32 required "temporary" relocation of certain cargo facilities and this was disclosed and discussed during the recent tariff consultation process at Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India (AERA), the operator mentioned. This upgrade work is also part of the Master Plan submitted to the MoCA, it added.

Mial also strongly denied any "insinuation" that these changes were intended to divert flights to the upcoming Navi Mumbai airport. The MoCA did not respond to the newspaper's queries regarding this matter.

In 2024-25, the Mumbai airport handled 654,756 tonnes of international cargo, recording a 10.7 per cent growth year-on-year (Y-o-Y), according to the data with Airports Authority of India. The Delhi airport, in comparison, handled 729,784 tonnes of international air cargo, an increase of 12.9 per cent Y-o-Y.