InfoX

DIGITAL & INFORMATION INTELLIGENCE

MIDDLE EAST AVIATION RISK REPORT

Situation as of 5 March 2026

Table of Contents

Overview (5 March 2026)

Context and Scope

This report provides a situational overview of aviation risks across the Middle East on 5 March 2026. It draws on multiple open sources of intelligence to summarise airspace closures, airport statuses, airline operations and emerging hazards following the escalation of conflict involving Iran, Israel and U.S. forces.

Key Takeaways

- **Widespread airspace closures remain in effect**: By 5 March, Iran's ballistic-missile and drone retaliation continued to compel neighbouring airspaces to close. Key flight information regions (FIRs) such as Iran, Iraq, Israel, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Syria remained closed to civil aviation. The central Gulf corridor connecting Europe and Asia remained unavailable, forcing airlines to divert via northern and southern bypass routes.
- **Major hubs in the Gulf are shut**: Dubai (DXB), Abu Dhabi (AUH), Doha (DOH), Sharjah and Kuwait City airports were closed or available only for limited, pre-approved flights. Operations into these airports required strict permits and compliance with designated corridors.
- **Limited repatriation flights begin**: From 5 March Qatar Airways and Emirates operated their first relief flights since 28 February, using Muscat and Riyadh as staging points. Most scheduled passenger services remained suspended.
- **Navigation hazards and electronic warfare**: GPS jamming and spoofing incidents were reported across the UAE's FIR. Collocation of civil airports with military targets increases misidentification risk.
- **Ongoing missile and drone threats**: Iranian drone strikes reached as far as Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan airport on 5 March. A ballistic missile launched from Iran was intercepted over southern Turkey on 4 March, illustrating the geographic reach of threats. Recent days saw multiple strikes across the Gulf, including hits on Qatar's Al Udeid air base, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and ports in Oman.

Regional Airspace Status (5 March)

Region/FIR	Status	Notes
Iran FIR (OIIX)	**Closed**	Following U.S.–Israeli strikes and Iranian retaliation, Iran closed its airspace to most civil traffic. Military operations and missile launches continue; EASA extended its Conflict Zone Information Bulletin (CZIB) advising operators not to use Iranian airspace.
Iraq & Baghdad FIR (ORBB)	**Closed**	Iraq kept its airspace closed; limited flights for repatriation require special approval.
Syria & Damascus FIR (OSDI)	**Closed**	Syria reopened a *single corridor from Aleppo to the Mediterranean* for foreign airlines, offering a safe path after assessment. However, the broader Syrian FIR remains closed and subject to high risk.
Israel (LLFI)	**Closed except limited permits**	Only critical or repatriation flights operate to/from Tel Aviv with prior permission. Airspace is vulnerable to missile and drone strikes.
Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia	**Restricted**	Airspace available but subject to route deviations and military monitoring. Operators must avoid conflict zones and comply with NOTAMs.
Oman (Oman FIR)	**Open**	Muscat became a staging point for repatriation and cargo flights as it lies outside the restricted Gulf airspace. Oman's FIR remains open but is seeing increased traffic.
United Arab Emirates (Dubai/Abu Dhabi FIR)	**Partially Open with Corridors**	The Emirates FIR is subject to Emergency Security Control of Air Traffic (ESCAT). Only flights holding a No Objection Certificate (NOC) may use restricted corridors for arrivals and departures, and overflights are limited to waypoint LUDID. GNSS jamming/spoofing has been reported.
Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar FIRs	**Closed**	Complete closure of airspace; no commercial flights except limited repatriation or government-approved operations.

Implications for Flight Planning

- **No central Gulf transit**: The closure of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain FIRs means there is no central corridor between Europe and South-East Asia. Airlines must route flights either far north (over Turkey–Armenia–Turkmenistan) or far south (via Oman and the Arabian Sea)
- **Increased fuel burn and congestion**: Longer routes increase flight time and fuel consumption, and the open corridors via the Black Sea or southern routes are congested, causing slot delays and potential rerouting

Airport and Airline Status

Gulf Hubs

- **Dubai International (DXB)**, **Abu Dhabi (AUH)** and **Sharjah (SHJ)**: Airports remained closed to scheduled commercial flights on 5 March, with **only around 100 repatriation and cargo flights permitted via restricted corridors**. Emirates operated limited flights on 5–6 March, carrying stranded passengers and essential cargo. Dubai International reported four injuries from missile debris, and Zayed International (Abu Dhabi) reported one death and seven injuries following drone strikes earlier in the week.
- **Doha's Hamad International (DOH)**: Qatar's airspace closure kept DOH shut to all regular passenger and cargo flights. Qatar Airways suspended operations; only limited relief flights were authorised from **Muscat to European destinations and Riyadh to Frankfurt** starting 5 March.
- **Kuwait International (KWI)** and **Bahrain International (BAH)**: Both airports remained closed for commercial operations. Airspace closures extended to these hubs, with only government flights potentially allowed.
- **Muscat International (MCT)**: The airport became a crucial staging area for evacuation and repositioning flights. Airlines used Muscat to reposition aircraft for relief services because it lies outside the most restricted zones.

Airlines

Airline	Status on 5 March	Notes
Qatar Airways	**Suspended** with limited relief flights	All scheduled flights to and from Doha remained suspended due to Qatari airspace closure. Qatar Airways operated its first relief flights since 28 February, departing from Muscat (to London, Berlin, Copenhagen, Madrid, Rome and Amsterdam) and from Riyadh to Frankfurt.
Emirates	**Partial operations**	Emirates resumed limited services to repatriate passengers and transport essential cargo. Over 100 flights were scheduled to operate between 5 and 6 March under strict corridors. Most flights remained cancelled.
Etihad Airways	**Suspended**	Etihad flights remained suspended until at least 6 March; only repositioning, cargo and repatriation flights operated under strict approvals
Global carriers (British Airways, Lufthansa, KLM, etc.)	**Suspended**	Many international airlines suspended flights to the Gulf and Israel after the conflict escalated

Airport and Airline Status

Airline	Status on 5 March	Notes
Cargo operations	**Limited**	Emirates SkyCargo and Etihad planned limited freighter schedules starting 7 March and 9 March respectively. Cargo operations focused on clearing backlog and repositioning aircraft.

Security Incidents and Risk Factors

Missile and Drone Activity

- **Nakhchivan Airport (Azerbaijan)**: On 5 March an Iranian drone struck UBBN/Nakhchivan airport. The Baku FIR's southern sector was closed, although main overflight flows were unaffected.
- **Iranian missile intercepted over Turkey**: A ballistic missile launched from Iran was intercepted over southern Turkey on 4 March, illustrating the potential reach of missiles beyond the Gulf.
- **Series of strikes (1–4 March)**: The period leading to 5 March saw multiple attacks: drone strikes on Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base, debris hits in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, and strikes on an Omani port. These incidents underline the unpredictable nature of the threat and the risk of collateral damage to civil aviation.

Regulatory and Advisory Updates

- **EASA Conflict Zone Information Bulletin (CZIB)**: On 4 March the European Union Aviation Safety Agency extended its CZIB to all altitudes over the airspace of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Oman and Saudi Arabia. The bulletin advised operators **not to operate in these airspaces** due to missile and air-defence risks. The validity extended through 6 March (and expected to be renewed).
- **NOTAMs**: Multiple NOTAMs remained in force across Gulf FIRs, mandating closures or route restrictions. For example, flights entering the UAE FIR required an NOC and could use only specific corridors for arrivals and departures. Overflights were restricted to route via the waypoint LUDID.

InfoX

DIGITAL & INFORMATION INTELLIGENCE

PASSENGER SENTIMENT AND TRAVEL DEMAND INSIGHTS

28 February - 5 March

Overview of Media Data

This section analyses passenger sentiment and travel demand patterns relating to Middle East aviation disruption following the escalation of the Iran-Israel conflict. Findings are derived from over **~600,000 posts and articles** recorded in the past week (28 Feb - 5 Mar) regarding discussions on flight disruptions, travel behaviour, and airline travelling.

Passenger discussions surged as Dubai, Doha, and Abu Dhabi airports experienced full shutdowns, and Muscat remained the most stable corridor with minimal cancellations.

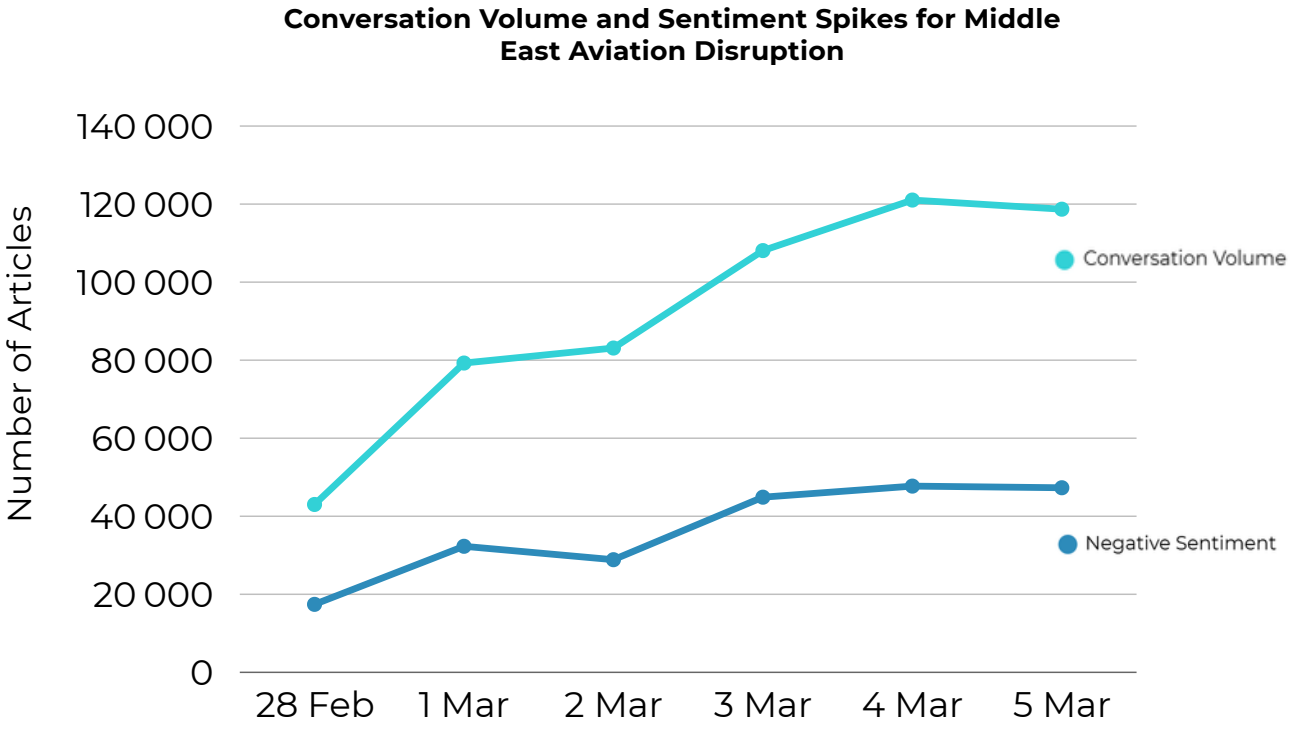
Main disucssion themes

The dominant themes include airspace closures, flight cancellations, passenger stranding, rerouting, and travel advisories. Passengers frequently discussed the impact on connectivity between Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, as well as the sudden rise in airfares and limited seat availability.

Safety concerns, operational updates from airlines, and the need for alternative travel arrangements were widely shared, with many travelers seeking information and support from carriers.

Top Countries of Origin for Discussion

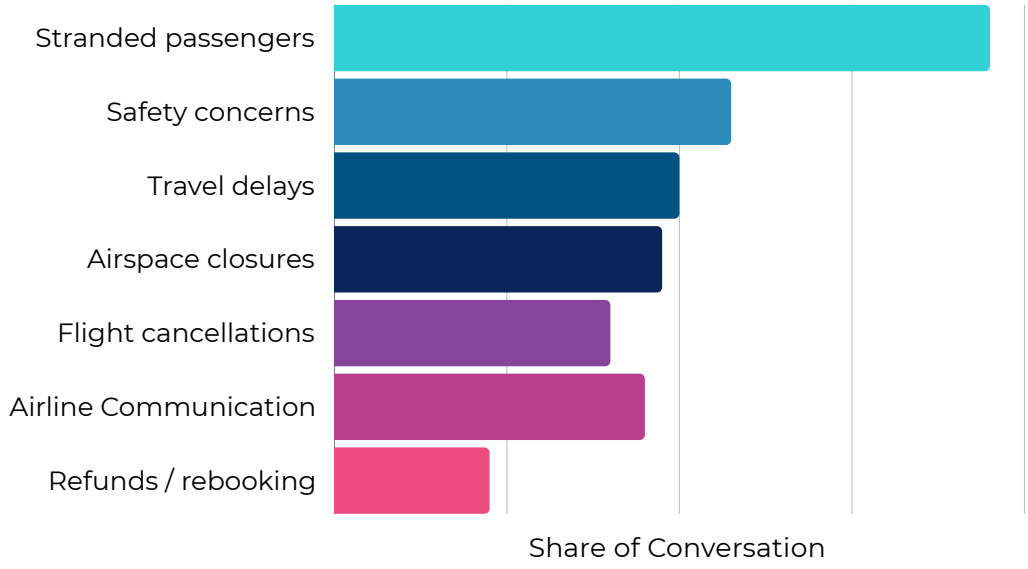
The majority of passenger conversations originate from the UAE, Qatar, India, and Saudi Arabia, with significant volumes also from Europe and North America. This reflects the global impact of the disruption on transit passengers and international travelers



Key Concerns

This thematic analysis captures passenger reports or conversation about aviation disruption across **Qatar Airways, Emirates, Etihad Airways**, as well as major regional transit hubs including **Doha, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Muscat, and Riyadh**.

The clusters below are ranked by their share of conversation, providing an overview of the primary concerns shaping passenger sentiment during the crisis.



The most prominent theme within the dataset concerns **passengers being stranded**, which represents the largest share of conversation. Many travellers reported being unable to depart due to sudden **flight cancellations, airport closures, or airspace restrictions** affecting major Gulf hubs.

Passengers frequently described situations where they were **confined to airports or hotels while awaiting updates from airlines or authorities**. Reports commonly referenced extended waits, limited access to confirmed flights, and uncertainty regarding when normal operations might resume. In several cases, travellers described sleeping in airport terminals or seeking accommodation while waiting for relief flights or rebooked services.

Locations of Stranded Passengers

Overall, the dataset suggests that **tens of thousands of passengers have been affected by the disruption**, with the largest concentration of stranded travellers located in **Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha**. Reports indicate that **thousands of transit passengers were unable to continue their journeys**, prompting large-scale repatriation operations and emergency travel arrangements.

Geographically, the disruption is concentrated across the **Gulf region**, particularly the **United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman**, with evacuation flights primarily routed towards **Europe, India and Southeast Asia.**

The **largest concentration of stranded passenger reports** originates from **Dubai International Airport (DXB)**, which appears most frequently in discussions describing cancelled flights, overcrowded terminals, and limited accommodation availability. Passengers frequently referenced waiting in airport terminals or nearby hotels while awaiting updates on relief flights or rebooked services.

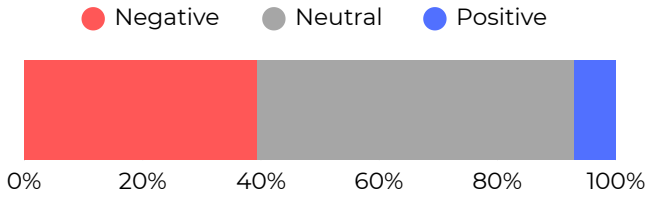
Location/ Airport	Scale of Stranded Passengers	Most Mentioned Airlines	Relief/Evacuation Activity
Abu Dhabi / Zayed International (AUH)	**High**	Etihad Airways	Limited flight operations, embassy flights
Doha / Hamad International (DOH)	**High**	Qatar Airways	Relief flights, embassy support
United Arab Emirates / Dubai International (DXB)	**Highest**	Emirates, flydubai	Multiple repatriation flights, partially resumed
Manama, Jeddah, Amman	**Moderate**	Various	Rerouting, limited relief flights
Oman / Muscat International (MCT)	**Moderate**	Oman Air, IndiGo, Air India	Transit for repatriation, alternative route

Passenger Sentiment across Airlines

Qatar Airways

Conversation Volume:

609,610 posts and articles



Key Passenger Complaints

- Sudden flight cancellations and rerouting
- Passengers stranded in Doha with limited support
- Difficulty accessing timely updates or rebooking

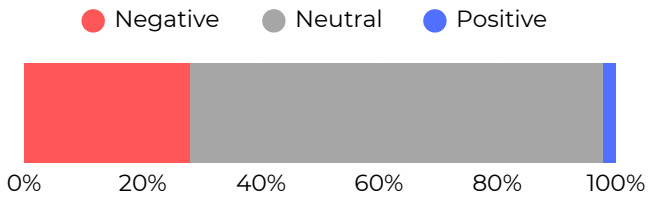
Key Positive Mentions

- Complimentary date changes and refunds for affected tickets
- Deployment of extra staff to assist stranded travelers
- Safety prioritization and operational transparency

Emirates

Conversation Volume:

253,364 posts and articles



Key Passenger Complaints

- Suspension of all flights to and from Dubai
- Passengers sleeping on terminal floors, hotels at capacity
- Uncertainty about flight status and lack of timely updates

Key Positive Mentions

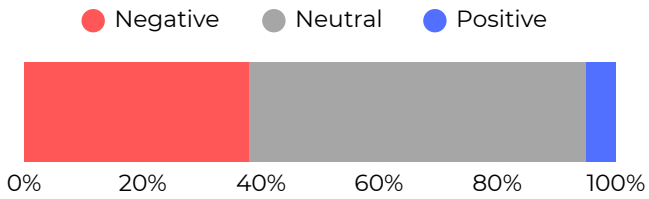
- Full refunds and flexible rebooking for affected travelers

Passenger Sentiment across Airlines

Etihad Airways

Conversation Volume:

561,659 posts and articles



Key Passenger Complaints

- Suspension of all commercial flights to and from Abu Dhabi
- Passengers unable to access the airport without confirmed tickets
- Uncertainty and delays in communication

Key Positive Mentions

- Free rebooking up to March 18 and full refunds for affected tickets
- Temporary accommodation and meals provided for stranded passengers
- Continuous communication and operational updates

Impact of Conflict on Travel Demand

This section analyses changes in passenger travel behaviour across Middle East routes during the aviation disruption.

Demand Category	Key Drivers
Delayed Demand	Passengers postponing travel until airspace reopens or conflict subsides
Displaced Demand	Rerouting to avoid Gulf hubs, seeking alternative routes via Africa, Europe, or Asia
Suppressed Demand	Airspace closures, safety concerns, mass flight cancellations
Urgent Travel Demand	Stranded passengers, evacuation requests, repatriation efforts

Overall, the dataset suggests that suppressed demand (cancelling flights) are the dominant short-term travel behaviours, as passengers either cancel travel or attempt to reroute through alternative hubs. At the same time, a notable level of urgent travel demand remains present among passengers attempting to depart the region following the disruption.