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Congestion, vessel attacks exacerbate India-Middle East cargo flow strain



Sources report lengthier berthing delays at the ports of Fujairah and Khor Fakkan (pictured) in the United Arab Emirates. Photo credit: Elena Serebryakova / Shutterstock.com.

Bency Mathew, India Special Correspondent | Oct 19, 2026, 10:48 AM EDT

Container shipping services to the Middle East are facing renewed operational strain, forcing carriers moving transshipment volumes into the conflict region via India to curtail sailings or rework loading plans, industry sources say.

The sources have reported lengthier berthing delays at the ports of Fujairah and Khor Fakkan in the United Arab Emirates, two vital contingency supply chain lifelines for the Persian Gulf after the war disrupted conventional shipping routes.

"The Gulf ports are severely congested," said an executive from a major mainliner operating India-Middle East services who didn't want to be identified. "Vessels are having to wait up to two to three weeks to secure a berth, more often at Fujairah."

With vessel rotation times stretching well beyond planned schedules, departures from Indian load ports — mainly Nhava Sheva (JNPA) — have been fewer or erratic in recent weeks, including

on CMA CGM's India-Gulf "Bigex" network. As a result, the French carrier is said to be prioritizing Middle East-linked relay volumes by delaying Indian exports or gateway cargo.

"There has been a 50% cut in the Bigex capacity out of India in October," a CMA CGM terminal executive in Nhava Sheva told *Journal of Commerce*. "We are now pooling two ships from other trades to reinforce Bigex operations."

Hormuz ship attacks strain capacity

As the congestion plaguing alternative Middle East gateways extends beyond the terminal gates, cross-border shipment contracts by carriers via multimodal or land bridge solutions involving trucking are also in a state of flux. Additionally, sources believe the effective feeder capacity out of India for Middle East movement could become even tighter in the coming weeks following a series of recent ship attacks around the Strait of Hormuz.

"These incidents have impacted 11,400 TEUs of nominal capacity," a Mumbai-based feeder line executive told *Journal of Commerce*. "The extent of cargo losses and other operational impacts is yet to be confirmed and assessed fully."

The executive, who didn't want to be identified, also noted that the attacks dealt a major blow to Dubai-based Global Feeder Shipping (GFS), an offshoot of AD Ports, just as the short-sea carrier was beefing up India-Middle East operations, including shipping containers directly to riskier Jebel Ali (Dubai) on behalf of Maersk.

Meanwhile, ocean rates on India-Middle East trades continue to stay elevated with little sign of easing amid the added capacity pressure. Forwarder sources in India put average booking prices out of Nhava Sheva at $5,000 per FEU for Fujairah and Khor Fakkan, $3,500/FEU for Sohar (Oman), $7,000/FEU for Jebel Ali, and $7,500/FEU for Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

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