



## City profile

## Chittagong, Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

Located in the southeast, metropolitan Chittagong is the second largest city in Bangladesh. Its strategic location as the busiest seaport in the region has made it a major economic hub attracting strong inflows of foreign investment into the production of apparel, ship breaking and oil refinery activities. The city boasts a deep harbor that supports strongly commerce, business and industrial activities. However, despite its rich scenic and natural endowments, population growth and poor planning has caused serious social, infrastructure and environmental problems so that about a third of its population live in slums. This profile captures the historical origin, and socio-economic and spatial development of Chittagong city. It also discusses the growing infrastructure and environmental challenges facing the city and the need for the introduction of an integrated multidimensional framework to make the city more livable than its present situation.

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## 1. Introduction

A number of cities in South Asia have been profiled before. Examples include Chennai and Delhi in India (Ahmad, Balaban, Doll, & Dreyfus, 2013; Rashmi & Desouza, 2015), Rangoon in Myanmar (Morley, 2013), Kathmandu in Nepal (Thapa, Murayama, & Ale, 2008), Thimphu in Bhutan (Walcott, 2009) and Colombo in Sri Lanka (van Horen, 2002). A similar profiling of Chittagong from Bangladesh will be useful to expand our understanding of cities in the sub-continent.

Located in the southeast of Bangladesh (22°13'N–22°27'N and 91°40'E–91°53'E) and facing the Bay of Bengal, Chittagong is well-known as the commercial capital and the busiest seaport city in the country. With a land area of 157 km<sup>2</sup> Chittagong is the second largest city in Bangladesh. Inheriting its traditional role as an important harbor for seafaring spice trade between Europe and the East in history, Chittagong stands out with its strategic location and friendly business environment, which makes it a national economic hub of hundreds of the oldest and largest industries in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). Being a major contributor toward national exports and imports, Chittagong has become a thriving city with strong linkages to the domestic economy.

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With production accounting for over 40% of national industrial output in 2012, the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ), which employed over 150,000 employees, contributed more than 50% of Bangladesh's tax revenue earnings and Chittagong contributed 11% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Muzzini & Aparicio, 2013). Rapid growth has helped to attract a growing number of national and international investors into the city's manufacturing sector, which is poised to become the 'regional manufacturing hub' in the future. CEPZ was already ranked fourth and third respectively in the categories of best economic potential and best cost competitiveness in 2010/2011, while metropolitan Chittagong region was ranked as the tenth fastest growing city in the world in 2010 (FDI, 2011; The Telegraph, 2010). In addition, the port city is very much crucial for the regional development of South Asian land-locked countries like Nepal, Bhutan and parts of Southern China, Northeast India and Myanmar (Ahmed, 2013; Rasiah, Al-Amin, & Tin, 2012).

Despite its immense potential, Chittagong faces great challenges because of high population growth, scattered industrial locations and poor infrastructure, which have reduced its charm as a desirable city to live in South Asia (Herrmann & Svarin, 2009; Hossain, 2001; Mahmood, 2011; Uddin & Firoj, 2013).

Hence, this paper aims to contribute to the growing literature on cities by highlighting the evolution of Chittagong from a small port to the region's main engine of economic growth, as well as, to highlight its socio-economic and environmental issues, which will have ramifications for its future planning and growth. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. We start the discussion by

focusing on the historical development of Chittagong followed by its socio economic conditions. We subsequently discuss the problems and challenges facing the city, including transportation, infrastructure and environmental issues. Next, we evaluate the spatial planning and master plan of Chittagong city followed by the concluding remarks.

## 2. Historical development

According to a Burmese chronicle, Chittagong was ruled by a long line kings founded in the city of Visali and known as Chandra Dynasty in the 8th to 9th centuries (Yunus, 1994). During 10th century, Chittagong was ruled by the Buddhist king, Gopichandra, who made his capital in the place where Chittagong is now located. According to Tibetan tradition Chittagong was the birthplace of one of the Buddhist tantric, Tilayogi who lived and worked in Chittagong in 10th century (Ahmed, 2013).

Although Chittagong was mostly ruled by Buddhist rulers before the 10th Century, the arrival of Islam from in the Middle East intensified its influence over the Indian sub-continent, including Chittagong (Sissener, 2008). Consequently, Arab merchants from Baghdad and Basrah frequently visited the city to trade and preach. The transmission of religious messages increased tremendously after the conquest of Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1204, which stimulated huge inflows of Muslim migrants. Except for a short period between 1538 and 1666 when the Arakanese regained power with the help of Portuguese pirates, Chittagong was dominated by Islamic culture until the mid-18th century (Eaton, 1993). Chittagong was renamed “Porte Grande” during Portuguese colonialism, but Portuguese influence diminished when the British made Calcutta (India) as the capital of the East India Company over the 18th and 19th centuries.

Chittagong was made a major military base by the British during World War II. The first aerodrome was subsequently set up in Patenga (Fig. 1). Porte Grande was renamed as Islamabad by the Mughals who captured the city from the Arakanese in 1666 (Rizvi, 1970). Chittagong got its name back in the mid-18th century when the British began colonizing India. The name Chittagong has remained unchanged since. The name Chittagong was derived from Arabic word *Shat* (delta) and prefixed to Ganga (Ganges), which means the ‘city at the mouth of the Ganges’ (Sissener, 2008).

However, the development of Chittagong was interrupted by Japanese invasion during World War II when the whole city was badly destroyed from two days heavy bombardment in 1942 (Corporation, 2007). The tragic incident disabled the functioning of the city administration and set the city in the dark for a long period. Its basic infrastructure was heavily damaged, which resulted in the relocation of all commercial activities to the nearby districts. The war brought not only sufferings to the local community, but also The Great Famine of 1943. The revolt of the East Bengal Regiment against the Pakistani army in 1971 brought Chittagong into military spotlight again. Major Ziaur Rahman declared the independence of Bangladesh under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (who was detained by the Pakistani army after he had won the election to form the government in then undivided Pakistan) (Zahed, 2013), which gave birth to Bangladesh.

After the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, migration between India and Pakistan accelerated the expansion of Chittagong as most of the migrants from India to East Pakistan (Bangladesh) resettled in the cities and towns (Nazem, 2013). The city flourished with the gradual resettlement and business expansion attracting further migrants from neighboring areas. Meanwhile, the synergy from its trading port helped expand the commercial and industrial sectors, which stimulated strong

growth in employment in the city. Growing initially from small settlements in the northwest of Karnaphuli River in 1948 to an extended region along the west of the riverbank in 1992, the surface geometry of the city of Chittagong has changed remarkably over the last fifty years (Chittagong Development Authority, 2008).

## 3. Socio-economic conditions

### 3.1. Administrative structure and population

The city is administrated by a self-governed organization called Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) which is divided into 41 wards. As the smallest administrative division within the city, a ward is governed by an elected ward commissioner. The mayor of the city is elected as the head of City Corporation by vote every five years. Each of the ward elects a commissioner and they are the representative for wellbeing of the city dwellers. The City Corporation has several departments, such as engineering, environment, accounting, health, education, different local affairs and headed by an executive officer deputed by central government. Being responsible to city Mayor, executive officer is the highest administrative official of CCC in charge of local affairs and reports to Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operative of central government (Hashemi, 2006). Although the sources of local revenue includes various channels such as taxation, licensing and estate management (housing, leasing, etc.), local authority has difficulties to meet the financial target. For example, while the estimated CCC income in 2013 was targeted at 364.03 crore (approximately US \$56 million), CCC was only able to achieve 35.4% of the targeted amount (129.02 crore, approximately US\$19.85 million) (Chittagong City Corporation, 2015a).

The population of metropolitan Chittagong was 4,009,423 in 2011, which had grown on average by 3.6% per annum between 1991 and 2001 (Table 1). Although the average growth rate of 2.3% per year in 2001–2011 is lower than previous years, it still exceeded national population growth, which was 1.2% over the same period (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). Males (54.4%) slightly outnumbered females (46.6%) in 2011. While Kotwali is the most populated and urbanized part of Chittagong and is characterized by major high rising buildings, the least populated Patenga in the south facing the Bay of Bengal houses the industrial area where the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) and Shah Amanat International Airport are located (Muzzini & Aparicio, 2013).

The sex ratio between male and female in Chittagong revealed that there are on average 122 men for every 100 women with a breakdown of 39% of age 18 and above (39%) followed by 36% of age 10 and below and the remaining 25% of age 11–17. Thus, to support a high dependency ratio of 61:39, the city faces a huge burden to finance education, nutrition, health and other social services, which inevitably explains why it lacks adequate urban services, including health and education (Werna & Harpham, 1996) (see Table 2).

The majority of the population of Chittagong constitutes of Bengalis and Muslims. The other ethnic groups include the *Chakma* and *Marma*. Table 3 shows the population of Chittagong by religion in year 2011. The literacy rate in Chittagong has gradually increased over the years from 44.6% in 1981 to 58.2% in 1991, 64.3% in 2001 and 68.8% in 2011 respectively (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013a). Although Bangla is the official language of Bangladesh, a dialect known as *Chittagonian*, which is a mixture of *Bengali* and *Assamese* is widely spoken by the natives. In addition to Bengali, most ethnic groups speak their own language, such as, *Chakma*, *Arakanese* and *Urdu*. Urdu is commonly spoken by the *Biharis*, *Firingis* (descendant of Portuguese settlers) and *Aryans*

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