

Coastal cities in Asia are sinking

Cities along the coasts of South and Southeast Asia are sinking — even faster than similar cities elsewhere — because of rapid, poorly controlled urbanization, scientists say, heightening risks already posed by rising sea levels.

Over the past two decades, the population of Chittagong in Bangladesh, on the Bay of Bengal, has swelled by more than 120 percent to 5.2 million. It is also one of the world's fastest-sinking cities, according to new research.

The study, published this week in the journal *Nature Sustainability*, found that land is sinking particularly quickly in coastal cities built on “flat, low-elevation river deltas,” where groundwater and oil extraction are driven by rapid growth and urbanization.

Led by Singapore's Nanyang Technological University,

a group of international scientists used satellite imagery taken between 2014 and 2020 to analyze sinking land across 48 of the most densely populated coastal cities, with populations of at least 5 million, across the world. They found that the median velocity of land subsidence — the rate at which land is sinking — in each of the 48 coastal cities ranges as high as 16.2 millimeters per year, or more than 0.6 inches.

Cities in Indonesia, Myanmar, and India also have some of the highest rates of land subsidence, the study showed. Washington was among the 48 coastal cities studied but has a relatively low rate of land subsidence - averaging zero millimeters annually - and is at a lower risk of being affected by rising sea levels.

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