

The incredible ‘goatness’ of being



NO STRINGS ATTACHED
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The saga of a Tk15 lakh goat with an impressive pedigree, followed by the unfolding of the jaw dropping accumulation of wealth of an NBR official, may make us rethink our derisive attitude toward this misunderstood animal. I mean the goat, of course.

After all, we cannot deny that in Bangalee culture, we often refer to people who do dumb things as a “chhagol” (goat), going as far as calling someone the offspring of a goat (chhagoler bachcha), a term lost in translation: in English, it would be calling someone a “kid” (baby goat), which does not carry the same degree of humiliation.

We may have to rethink our “goat dismissiveness”.

The town is abuzz about how the astronomical price of a goat the size of a small horse led to the opening of a gigantic can of worms and, for the media, a treasure trove of sensational stories. It was the son of the mysterious NBR member who had spilled the first beans that led to the revelation of his father’s enormous real estate acquisitions and piles of cash made from shares. Like a typical rich spoilt brat, he made the mistake of bragging about the Tk 15 lakh goat he had acquired at a bargain price of Tk 12 lakh. A video clip of this went viral on social media, leading to intense speculations about the source of his father’s wealth. The NBR official was eventually transferred to a post in another ministry as a reprimand for the embarrassment he caused his organisation, one presumes.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is investigating allegations of corruption against the official whose basic salary was Tk 78,000 a month. According to media reports, the person under investigation and



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

his family’s wealth include luxury resorts, a shooting spot and multiple bungalows. A report by *The Daily Star* reveals he also has three crore shares in at least 10 companies.

Jean”) naming only the two children from his first wife. The media reported that the young goat connoisseur was his second wife’s son. While he may have reacted badly to the

stupidity of his offspring for exposing him, albeit unintentionally, it cannot be denied that he has been a generous father giving him a bevy of fancy cars and enough cash to allow him to buy 50-plus lakh taka worth of sacrificial animals, which obviously he also bragged about and was gleefully reported by the media.

He is also, no doubt, a generous husband considering the queenly lifestyle of his first wife, a retired government college teacher and upazila parishad chairman who lives in a white, two-storied mansion in Raipura and has even managed to get the road that leads

to her home named after herself, according to a *Daily Star* report.

In fact, all the highly placed public officials against whom there are allegations of acquiring illegal wealth through dubious means (corruption is such a boring, overused word these days) seem to be ultra-devoted to their families. They buy luxury flats and resorts for their wives and children and go as far as bestowing lavish “gifts” upon their in-laws. Another official the ACC is investigating bought Tk 30 lakh and Tk 29 lakh worth of saving certificates for his father-in-law and brother-in-law, respectively. Meanwhile, his mother-in-law, a homemaker, has 10 bank accounts with transactions amounting to Tk 7 crore, as detected by ACC, no doubt thanks to her charming son-in-law. Now who wouldn’t want a “jamai” like that?

These individuals are also champions of local tourism, building luxury resorts in the unlikelyst of places on acres and acres of land, giving the fun-starved public a nice place to go to. Sure, some of them may have forcefully taken away the lands of the poor and marginalised, but one must look at the bigger picture and see the bigness of their hearts (and wallets) that have given us these beautiful spots to visit.

The series of reports on the unaccounted-for wealth accumulation of public officials, some being the top bosses of very important government entities, gives the impression that the state’s “zero tolerance for corruption” policy is finally in action. Maybe, but one cannot help but be a little sceptical of the official repercussions these individuals have faced—transfers to a different ministry, or a slight demotion to a lower grade, which seem a mere slap in the wrist for what would be considered a serious crime. The ACC, meanwhile, seems to be the lone hero in this saga—investigating the cases, freezing assets and accounts and sharing its juicy findings with a hungry media. Oh, and of course, let’s not forget the unlikely heroes like our giant, magnificent goat which has definitely given these neglected animals a far more elevated status than ever before.

Heroes and villains of the climate crisis

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In Alexander Ward’s book *The Internationalists*, there is an account of a debate between the United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on how the United States should address the issue of China in climate negotiations. Kerry argues that America and China must cooperate. Sullivan disagrees—they should focus on “boxing China out” and make deals with other countries. Sullivan argues that they should instead present China as the main climate villain, and force them to the negotiating table on US’ terms.

Economist Raghuram Rajan recently wrote an article for the *Financial Times* in the aftermath of the Indian elections, arguing that the Modi administration’s focus on expanding manufacturing is misguided: “The world does not have political or climatic room for another China-sized economy exporting manufactured goods.” Notably, the lack of room is both “political” and “climatic”. The unspoken “political” factor here is the recent American anxiety around Chinese overcapacity—G7 economies are worried about losing advanced manufacturing capacity to competitors in all emerging markets (not just China).

The “climatic” factor brings us back to the question of climate justice.

Who is the real “climate villain?”

Historical emissions and global inequality

How can one measure climate villainy? If we were to take annual carbon emissions, then the primary villain is very clear—it is the People’s Republic of China, followed by the United States of America. If we measure “climate villainy” on this scale then one can even present the US as a relative “climate hero”—it’s an example of a large, high-population economy that can sustain a higher quality of life than China while producing fewer emissions. Thanks to the radical green agenda in Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act (glowingly endorsed by progressives) and the visionary entrepreneurialism of Elon Musk, it will be the US that saves the world from the climate crisis, just as it saves the world from every crisis.

This is the story US progressives would like to tell—of the climate hero America saving the world from the climate villain China.

The problem with looking only at annual carbon emissions is that carbon has accumulated over time. The climate crisis is not caused by present-day emissions, it is caused by the sum total of historical emissions. Once we account for the issue of historical emissions, we confront the heart of the matter: the benefits of historical carbon

consumption are restricted to a small handful of advanced economies, former Warsaw Pact countries and Gulf Arab petrostates, but the costs have to be borne by us all.

Consider the figure given, taken from a Nature Sustainability paper by climate scientist Jason Hickel:

The y-axis shows the cumulative GDP per capita from 1960-2018. The x-axis measures how much each country has overshoot or undershot the global carbon budget needed to restrict warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, relative to a hypothetical world where historical carbon consumption was divided

overshoot its fair share. But the main climate villain when we take historical emissions into account is very clear—it is the US.

Liability vs generosity

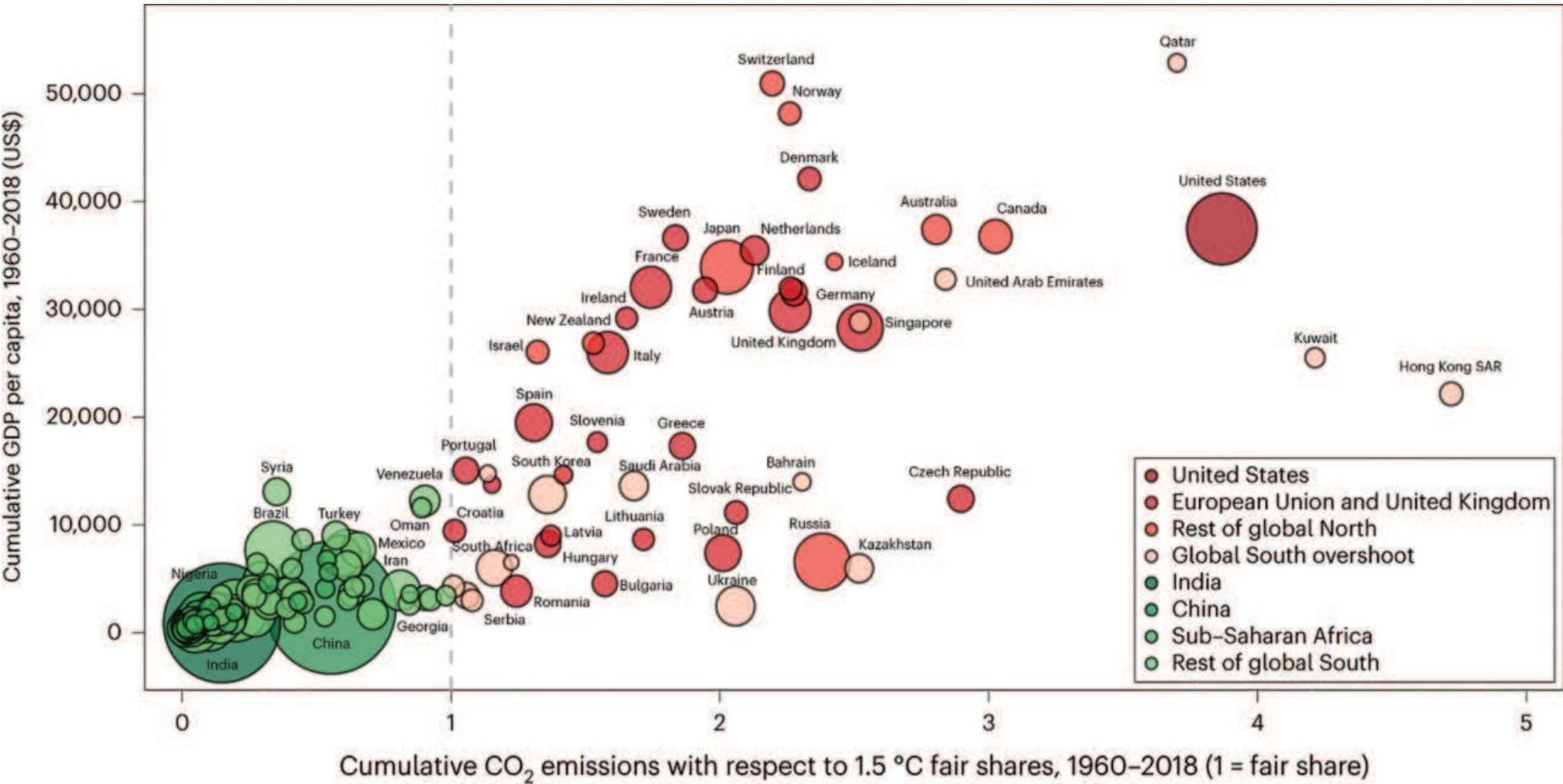
The solution to the problem of historical emissions is quite straightforward—Global North (red in the graph) countries owe liability payments to Global South (green) countries for exceeding their fair shares of the atmospheric commons. This would enable emissions reductions while still allowing for “catch-up” growth in the Global South, and help solve long-standing issues of global inequality. COP would be the ideal venue to

development. It is also essential to preserve as we pursue climate justice. Jake Sullivan’s strategy for climate negotiations with China suggests that senior American policymakers have abandoned it completely, choosing instead to use climate politics to suppress economic development in Global South competitors.

Let us return to Raghuram Rajan’s prescriptions for the Indian economy. “Climatic” factors are only a barrier to industrial development in India if we take the US position that only present-day emissions matter in determining climate responsibility.

economic competitor.

We speak of Bangladesh in terms of “climate vulnerability”. This is how the Global North would like to see us, as “vulnerable” people who exist only to be saved by their generosity and benevolence. This is the language of NGOs and aid dependency. This language also directs us away from the issue of liability payments that we are owed by the Global North. The climate crisis was not caused by Bangladesh, but the lives it claims will be disproportionately from Bangladesh. When you are not owed liability, you can only be grateful for generosity. We need to break



Cumulative CO2 emissions with respect to 1.5 degrees Celsius fair shares versus cumulative GDP per capita, 1960-2018.

SOURCE: JASON HICKEL

equally according to population—a value of 1 represents a country that has consumed exactly its fair share of global carbon.

A striking pattern emerges almost immediately—almost 70 percent of cross-national differences in cumulative per capita GDP can be explained solely by differences in cumulative emissions over time. Thus, it is impossible to disentangle the issue of global inequality from historical carbon emissions. With the exception of primarily the Gulf petrostates, the entirety of the Global South is in the bottom left of the chart, coloured in green. The figure ends in 2018, rapid economic development in the intervening period has since caused China to slightly

negotiate these payments.

However, the topic of liability payments at COP is consistently blocked by the Western negotiating bloc, particularly the US. The concept of Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR) was enshrined into international climate law in the Paris Agreement to acknowledge the issue of historical emissions but is under attack every year from Western nations. CBDR acknowledges that while all countries must act on climate change, the nature of our responsibilities is different and corresponds to our historic emissions. This framework is essential to protecting every sovereign nation’s inherent human right to

A historical emissions framework gives countries in the Global South room to grow and to reach some kind of parity in economic prosperity with the advanced economies. Liability payments offer a mechanism to achieve that parity.

By now I hope the readers can fully comprehend the dark motivations behind the consistent blocking of liability payments at COP. We should recognise this for what it is—an attempt by the Global North to use the climate crisis to lock in current patterns of global inequality and maintain their position of privilege in the commanding heights of the world economy. In the context of China, it was even to be used as a way to neutralise an

out of this paradigm.

Look again at the figure given. Don’t look at it through the lens of personal self-sacrifice and bleeding-heart activism. Don’t look at it through the eyes of NGOs. Look at it through the lens of your material self-interest. The emergence of China as a peer competitor to the United States creates the scope for the formation of a counter-hegemonic Global South bloc that can exercise coercion on Global North countries to demand liability payments and an acceptance of the historical emissions framework. In the present moment, this is the clearest path forward to climate justice.