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News / India / Climate Change: Need to move away from 'excessive preoccupation' with meeting global temperature target, says Economic Survey

# Climate Change: Need to move away from 'excessive preoccupation' with meeting global temperature target, says Economic Survey

India also called out the uniform and prescriptive nature of climate change strategies without taking into account the geographical, economic and climatic differences of countries.

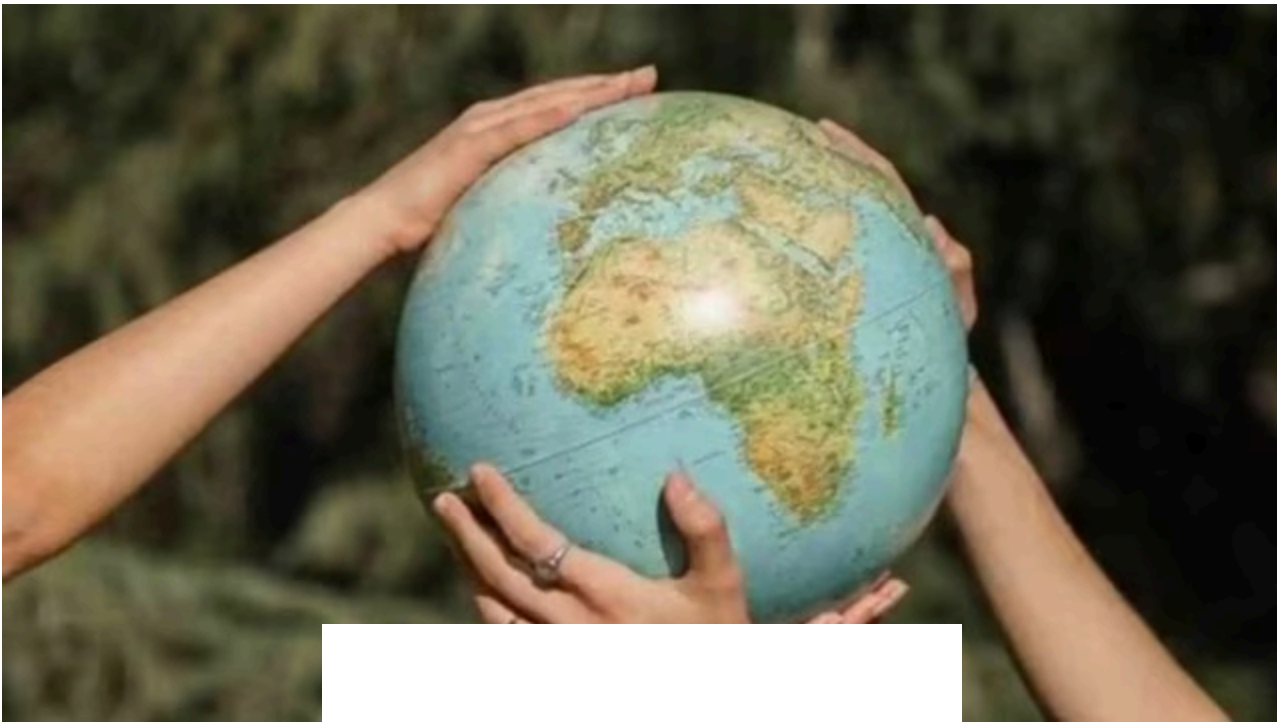
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The survey said the kind of demands being put on developing countries had a cost that was 'too much for most nations'. (File Photo)

MAKING A strong departure from the global narrative on climate change, India on Monday said risking economic welfare of the people in developing countries for keeping global temperatures within some threshold was a “flawed” way of dealing with the problem.

Articulating a radically new argument on climate change in the [Economic Survey](#) presented in Parliament on Monday, the government suggested that nearer-term policies to improve the lives of the people were the best insurance against climate change, and the world needed to move away from its “excessive preoccupation” with meeting a single global temperature target, like the 1.5 or 2 degree Celsius thresholds.

The Economic Survey, which contained two chapters on climate change for the first time, lamented the fact that development goals had been “downgraded” and reduction of global emissions had been elevated “to the pinnacle of all economic policies”.

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The 2015 Paris Agreement asks countries to make efforts to ensure that the rise in global average annual temperature is contained within 2 degree Celsius from the pre-industrial times (average of 1850-1900 period), preferably within 1.5 degree Celsius itself. Every country has to prepare, and implement, an action plan that contributes towards meeting this target.

The Economic Survey twice quoted Mike Hulme, a professor of Geography at the University of Cambridge, to make the argument that this was not the best course. “...global temperature is a seriously flawed index for capturing the full range of complex relationships between climate and human welfare and ecological integrity,” Hulme wrote in his 2023 book *Climate Change isn't Everything: Liberating Climate Politics from Alarmism*.

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## EXPLAINED

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### Challenging climate change discourse

The inequities of the global climate change architecture, and the duplicity of developed nations in taking climate actions have been called out repeatedly by India and other developing countries, but this is the first time that India is questioning the very objective of the climate change discourse, which has been framed in terms of a single global temperature target. India's articulation comes at a time when it is becoming increasingly clear that the 1.5 degrees Celsius target would be missed, no matter what the world does in the next few years.

In the same book he also wrote: "It is quite easy to imagine future worlds in which global temperature exceeds 2 degrees Celsius, which is 'better' for human well-being, political stability and ecological integrity, for example, than other worlds in which – by all means and at all costs – global temperature was stabilised at 1.5 degrees Celsius."

The Economic Survey used these remarks to make the point that the current approach of tackling climate change, wherein all the efforts are directed to meeting a global temperature goal, might be counterproductive.

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Hulme is a contrarian, but not a denialist, and has experience of researching on climate change. He has contributed to the assessment reports of the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and was the founding director of Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, a reputed institution in the UK. He has also taught at King's College London. He has been critical of the "obsession" with net-zero targets, calling it "unfair" to the world's poor, and has argued that the world's climate "cannot simply be put back to some pre-disturbance condition".

The Economic Survey said that the kind of demands being put on the developing countries, particularly with regard to transitioning away from fossil fuels, had a cost that was "too much for most nations".

"It is hard to fault developing countries for not wanting to curb their energy consumption," it said.

"It is morally wrong to tell developing countries to abandon their aspirations for better living standards so that developed countries can maintain their ways of living in cleaner environments and cooler climates," it said.

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The Economic Survey argued that a more sustainable solution to the climate problem lay not in replacing one form of energy fuel with another, but in avoiding overconsumption and wastage and making lifestyle changes. Pointing out that the solutions being offered had their own set of problems, India gave the example of critical minerals required for batteries. These minerals were being mined in the most underdeveloped parts of the world, utilising the labour of poor people in very dangerous conditions.

"The current climate change strategy seems to say that given that our energy needs will continue to rise, we must try replacing conventional fuel with renewables and

clean energy — thus making it a substitution issue rather than a global lifestyle issue. This replacement must be done only in the way we know — through swapping of one preferred industry to another, through the creation of new transportation and supply lines in place of existing ones, penalising the low-emitters with disproportionately higher payments. What this strategy doesn't do is attack the root of the problem – overconsumption, which is starker amongst developed countries,” the survey said.

“Moreover, do each of us really need multiple screens, even if they are charged by renewable energy sources, or must everyone fly off to fancy destinations in fancy planes for a great conversation on reducing climate impact, or that we must eat for taste what we shouldn't eat for health or environment... instead of imbibing sustainable practices in the way we live, we worry more about carrying PETA labels on our bags,” it said.

India also called out the uniform and prescriptive nature of climate change strategies without taking into account the geographical, economic and climatic differences of countries.

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“Without cross-learning, many natural ideas relevant to sustainable development, such as consumption patterns, lifestyles, plant vs meat-based diet, etc., are not factored in... Beef production has the highest emissions per kilogram of food product... Despite this, there is not even a call for change, let alone a mandate (for reduction),” it said.

India argued that the scale of energy transitions that the countries were being asked to make for meeting the temperature target had never happened in history in the short period that was envisioned.

“...each widespread transition from one dominant fuel to another has taken 50 to 60 years... Energy transitions on a national or global scale are inherently protracted affairs. The unfolding shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources will be no exception,” the Economic Survey quoted Canadian researcher Vaclav Smil as saying.



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India said the world needed a more “balanced” approach to the problem of climate change. “It should also focus on nearer-term policy goals of improving human welfare rather than excessively preoccupied with one large, longer-term goal of global climate management... When we assess the best course of action going forward, we must compare alternative systems and weigh the benefits of avoiding climate change against the costs of transitioning to alternative energy and agricultural systems over time,” it said.

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