

ALARMING COUNTDOWN: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON NET ZERO CARBON EMISSION TARGET

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

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The title of the [United Nations' latest report, Broken Record](#), is a clever pun. Not only does it suggest that previous warnings of the consequences of rising greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) are being ignored but also that new ceilings are being breached. The annual emissions report, usually timed close to the beginning of the climate talks, reiterates in sharper language that progress, since the [Paris Agreement \(PA\) of 2015](#), has been tardy. The stated [goal was to keep temperatures from rising over 2°C](#), and ['as far as possible' below 1.5°C](#), of pre-industrial levels. In the last few years, much of the consensus has been that we should be directing all our efforts towards keeping it below 1.5°C. [The Broken Record report](#), however, suggests that accounting for all commitments made by countries, as per the PA, to minimise their economies' reliance on fossil fuel, temperatures would still result in an overshoot of 2.5°C-2.9°C by the end of the century. To keep temperature below 2°C, emissions by 2030 must be cut 28% and for 1.5°C, they need to be shaved by 42%. Despite many countries having promised to be 'net zero,' meaning no net carbon emissions, the report does not think these promises are 'credible' and even in the most optimistic scenarios, the likelihood of keeping emissions below 1.5°C are 14%.

However, it is not as if the PA has been infructuous. GHG emissions in 2030 based on policies in place were projected to increase by 16% at the time of the adoption of the PA. Today, the projected increase is 3%. To keep temperatures below 1.5°C, annual emissions must reduce every year, until 2030, by 8.7%. What the report says is that the world collectively emitted 57.4 billion tonnes in 2022, an increase of 1.2% over 2021. The pandemic saw 4.7% drop in emissions but the projections for 2023 suggest that the globe is nearly back to pre-pandemic emission levels. The consequences of the globe's tardiness are writ large. As of October this year, 86 days were recorded with temperatures over 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. September was the hottest recorded month ever, with global average temperatures 1.8°C above pre-industrial levels. In terms of solutions, the report repeats sage advice that has been offered for years: the richest countries and those historically responsible for gobbling sparse atmospheric capacity for carbon must commit to greater and faster reductions. While legalese and nit-picking have been characteristic of climate summits, precious little time remains for the world to get its act together.

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