

Would you buy fewer clothes to help the planet?

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Calcutta: Most households already own more clothes than they need, and voluntarily avoiding new garment purchases for a year could significantly benefit the climate, said climate activist Chetan Solanki during a recent visit to the city.

Solanki, who is travelling across India to raise climate change awareness, said: "Because of the culture of year-round sales, discounts and promotional offers, people often buy more clothes than they actually need. We need to reduce consumption because garment manufacturing is highly water and energy-intensive. It also contributes to air, water and soil pollution."

A former IIT Bombay professor, Solanki has been advocating a one-year pause on buying new clothes as a way to encourage more sustainable lifestyles. "At the present rate of consumption, humans are heading rapidly towards extinction," he said. "Our demands and desires are infinite, while the planet is finite. We are consuming resources at a rate equivalent to 1.8 earths. The only solution is to reduce consumption."

Solanki is the founder of NGO Energy Swaraj Foundation. He was in Calcutta on June 4 at the invitation of the Indian Women Networking (IWN), Confederation of Indian Industry, to participate in a

panel discussion on Finite Living and Fair Livelihoods.

The panel also featured Amit Chakraborty, former head of environmental, social and governance at Tata Steel; Darshan Shah of Weavers Studio; Roopa Mehta, director of Sasha, an association of craft producers; and designer Paromita Banerjee, a member of the Fashion Council of India. The discussion was moderated by Shoma Basu, an IWN member.

While agreeing that the textile industry is a driver of environmental degradation, Chakraborty cautioned that a no-buy approach could threaten the livelihoods of millions who depend on the sector.

He advocated a "5R" framework to reduce the environmental impact of clothing consumption: Reduce (buy fewer clothes), Repair (extend the life of garments and support local tailors), Rental (share or rent occasion wear), Resale (promote thrifting and clothing swaps), and Responsible buying (choose ethically produced apparel made from fair-trade and biodegradable fibres).

Swagata Guha, chairperson of IWN's Bengal chapter, said many people mistakenly believe that planting trees alone can address climate change. "We want discussions on practical actions that can make a real difference. We are also looking at raising awareness about carbon footprints in the MSME sector," she said.