

Get youth in action on climate change

COMMENT
By Mogesh Sababathy

THE role of a leader in general is to defend the sovereignty of a country and to advance progress for the well-being of the community. In a constitutional democracy, the choice of a leader is in the hands of the people, hence, all actions and decisions taken by the government led by him must be fully beneficial to the people.

Since the announcement of the dissolution of Parliament on Oct 10, the political development in the country has been a hot topic. It is our responsibility as Malaysians to elect leaders who are committed to ensuring the well-being of the people, and not only on issues concerning economic growth but also on environmental sustainability.

While priority should be given to implementing reforms in the administrative system, measures for economic growth should not be based solely on gross domestic product.

In fact, the country's economic growth must mutually support environmental protection, which is in line with Agenda 21 of the 1992 Rio Convention, that aims to stop damage to the environment by promoting sustainable development. This is because the effects of climate change are becoming increasingly noticeable and worrying, especially in Malaysia, following the several extreme weather events such as floods, frequent air and water pollution, extreme temperature increases and increasingly erratic weather in recent times. These do not only result in environmental degradation but also cause the quality of life to decline, resulting in the increase in socioeconomic disparity and diminished health in the community.

One of the ways to address this is to have a national economic

transformation strategy with a more sustainable direction by focusing on energy transition and increasing the promotion of green jobs, especially for the youth. Young people are the most affected by climate change. The government should seriously look at efforts to increase youth involvement, especially in public policy advocacy focused on environmental and climate issues.

In addition, efforts should be intensified to facilitate access to information related to the environment and policies so that the youth are more informed and are able to contribute to climate action plans at local or international levels by using online media platforms or print more efficiently and comprehensively.

Next, youth groups should also be recognised as strategic partners of the government in the policy-making process, not only to encourage the government to be more proactive but also produce young people who are more aware and concerned about environmental issues. This matter was highlighted at the Youth4Climate Summit held in conjunction with the 77th United Nations General Assembly in New York last month, which I participated in as the only Malaysian youth representative.

The summit, themed "Powering Action", emphasised four main pillars: Youth driving ambitions, sustainable recovery, non-state actors' engagement and climate conscious society. The summit also provided a space for youth activists from around the world to exchange opinions, share experiences and knowledge on issues and initiatives led by them to address climate change, and explore opportunities for them to collaborate and build a global youth community who are aware of environmental issues and climate change.

It is also to support youth involvement in climate action plans while fostering an inclusive ecosystem in the decision-making



The Youth4Climate Summit has called for youth groups to be recognised as government strategic partners.

process with national and world leaders at various levels.

Environmental governance needs to be coherent, efficient and responsive to the needs of all age groups and communities in designing participatory and systemic local solutions. This is because climate change action should involve collaboration with various parties, including marginalised groups such as youths and the Orang Asli community, so a more inclusive and comprehensive decision can be made.

The recent actions by the government in addressing climate issues are commended. Among these are the amendment of the Environmental Quality Act 1974, which increases the punishment for environmental offences, efforts to increase preparedness to deal with flood disasters in the form of strengthening warning systems, building water infrastructure that is resilient to climate disasters, development of the National Water Sector Transformation Agenda 2040, implementation of the Action Plan National Energy Efficiency which improves the efficiency of energy use and management as well as the drafting of a climate change Bill. All these show the high level of commitment of the government towards environmental issues, particularly in building a low-carbon and resilient country through climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

However, I hope the government will develop a clear and transparent progress monitoring strategy so that the target results from the implementation of these policies can be achieved to the fullest.

In addition, it is hoped that this would encourage active participation from the public, especially industry players and stakeholders who lead climate action at multiple levels, especially at grassroots level. Policy-making alone is not sufficient if the community does not have the awareness and knowledge on giving priority to climate change and environmental sustainability.

The community also have a critical role to play in supporting the government's goals. One of the ways is by improving environmental literacy through knowledge transfer strategies. This can be done by involving educational institutions in playing an active role in producing a young generation who is knowledgeable and concerned about the environment as well as becoming agents in spreading awareness within their own communities.

At the same time, the government should also step up efforts to encourage these institutions through financial incentives and facilities to increase research, innovation and community projects that are more focused on environmental management.

The Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change shows that

greenhouse gas emissions from human activities have been causing the warming of global temperatures of about 1.1°C since the end of the 19th century. It also found that the average global temperature over the next 20 years is expected to reach or exceed 1.5°C.

The issue of climate change, which is getting worse over time, should be taken seriously and dealt with in the same way that the government handled the Covid-19 pandemic that has been haunting people worldwide for the past two years.

Bill Gates, in an article published on his blog GatesNotes, stated that the impact of climate change may be worse than the Covid-19 pandemic if not addressed immediately.

Therefore, ahead of the 27th Conference of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in November, I urge the government to prioritise the need to address climate change.

I want to emphasise that progressive and immediate action is critical to limit the impact of climate change, which is a global crisis, and efforts to mitigate it is a shared responsibility.

Mogesh Sababathy, Malaysian Youth Climate Advocate, Co-founder of Project Ocean Hope, PhD candidate, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

"Progressive and immediate action is critical to limit the impact of climate change and efforts to mitigate it is a shared responsibility."