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Jasmin is an advocate for climate change awareness. – PICTURE COURTESY OF MILAINE THIA

The voice of the environment

■ BY S. TAMARAI CHELVI

CLIMATE change has become the most pressing cause in the eco-movement, especially among youths.

But Jasmin Irisha Jim Ilham did not just hop onto the “green bandwagon”.

The love of nature was seeded early in the 27-year-old, thanks to her grandfather, a forester.

The childhood influence made Jasmin an advocate for climate change awareness.

The climate and environmental consultant for Unicef Malaysia hopes that the voice of youth is taken seriously.

“Youth accounts for 43% of the population in Malaysia, making it a critical demographic group to engage with on climate action,” she said.

“The most severe impact of climate change will be faced by the next generation.

“The future could be catastrophic, if society does not act to limit temperature rise,” added Jasmin, who holds a masters degree in Climate and Society.

She is calling for an all-of-society approach, involving the government and the private sector.

“There is a need for political push. Leaders should be confident to make bold commitments and actually stick to it.

“All ministries should work together to prioritise the push against climate change,” she added.

The former manager of the Malaysian Youth Delegation also said that major emitting industries have to call for rapid decarbonisation.

“The time for just transition is now.”

What inspired you to get into climate change activism?

As a child, I spent a lot of time with my grandparents, especially my grandfather.

He worked at the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia in Kepong. Every other weekend, he would take my sister and me to visit the forest, and we would have a family picnic, play badminton, collect “Biji Saga Merah” (Saga seeds) and just spend time with nature.

I grew a deep sense of appreciation for the environment. As I entered secondary school, I had the opportunity to get actively involved with environmental-related programmes.

As I really enjoyed being outdoors and of course, taking care of the environment, I decided to pursue a degree in Environmental Science.

In university, I organised a series of initiatives, from Green Week to Earth Hour. Through my friends, I found out about a youth-led non-governmental organisation called #PowerShiftMsia, then the Malaysian Youth Delegation.

I applied to be part of the organisation and that led me to learn about local and global climate issues.

It was my stepping stone to climate

change activism.

What is the driving force behind your mission?

Climate change is a crisis that is occurring right this very second.

Malaysia is already experiencing the effects, with an increasing warming trend, higher rainfall variability, worsening floods etc.

Climate change impacts different groups of people differently. Children, youth, women, the B40, indigenous groups, refugees, migrants and persons with disabilities are more vulnerable.

Living in Ampang, I recognise my privilege. I live comfortably and have access to basic needs such as food, shelter, education and job opportunities.

I also recognise my responsibility and use my platform to give space for the vulnerable and marginalised groups to speak up and demand urgency from decision-makers.

How do you think the younger generation can make a change?

They are already acting now. It is more organised and connected than ever, utilising online platforms and social media as a tool for mobilisation and advocacy.

Reports show that 92% of young people in Malaysia think that climate change is a crisis.

It is important to listen, acknowledge and act on their demands to protect their rights to a healthy and sustainable environment