

Climate change forgotten?

VACCINES for Covid-19 are now available. Many see in them hope to end this pandemic and return the world's economy to normal. However, scientists warn that we may have to live longer if not permanently with the new normal: Already new and more infectious variants of the virus have appeared in Britain, creating uncertainty.

Still, with vaccines on hand, the urgency has died down a little. But there's another global threat that remains urgent and for which there is no vaccine: Climate change. Like the virus, the greenhouse gases that are catastrophically warming the planet are invisible yet ever present. But while countries stepped up and people made sacrifices to combat Covid-19, that same political and social will is missing in the fight against climate change.

Experts attribute the lack of progress to a lost sense of urgency and decades of talk with little to show for it. The Paris Agreement was supposed to pave the way for a carbon neutral world but remains in stalemate. While the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated that humanity has the capacity to respond to a global crisis, many may not appreciate that climate change is an even more significant challenge to humanity, one that threatens our long-term survival as a species.

Indeed, the impacts of global



-Photo: Bernama

warming are already killing people and devastating livelihoods. One report notes that more than 100 climate change-related disasters occurred in just the first six months of the pandemic, affecting over 50 million people. And the world's poorest and most at-risk people are being hit the hardest. What's more, climate experts stress that climate-driven disasters will only get worse.

The figures reported by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in its *2020 World Disasters Report* published last month are grim. In the past 10 years, 83% of all disasters triggered by natural hazards were caused by extreme weather- and climate-related events, such as floods, storms and heatwaves. The proportion of all disasters attributable to climate

and extreme weather events has also increased significantly during this time. These extreme weather- and climate-related disasters have killed more than 410,000 people in the past 10 years, the vast majority in low and lower middle-income countries. Heatwaves, then storms, have been the biggest killers. A further 1.7 billion people around the world have been affected by climate- and weather-related disasters during the past decade.

The good news is that even though the climate crisis is much more dangerous to human life on Earth than the pandemic, the US\$10 trillion (RM40.6 trillion) spent (so far) on the global response to the economic effects of the coronavirus crisis is far more than the amount of money the IFRC says is necessary to adapt to current and imminent climate-

driven disasters. According to the report, "it would take an estimated US\$50bil (RM203bil) annually to meet the adaptation requirements set out by 50 developing countries for the coming decade".

The organisation pointed out that "funding for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction does not seem to consistently prioritise the countries at highest risk and with the lowest ability to adapt and cope with these risks". None of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change and to climate- and weather-related disasters were among the 20 highest per person recipients of climate change adaptation funding.

Though not as bad off as some countries, we in Malaysia also have our fair share of climate-related disasters. The most frequent ones relate to floods, and consequent landslides, which occur during the monsoon months. It is therefore equally incumbent upon us to do our bit to support the global push for carbon neutrality. It is good that under the Smart City Framework, many of the nation's urban centres are embarking on initiatives to reduce their carbon footprints and become carbon neutral. But more needs to be done, and now.

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The neurodivergent as talents for IR4.0

THE Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) brings a fundamental change in the ways humans live and work. The World Economic Forum lists the critical skills for IR4.0: They are complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, judgement and decision making, service orientation, negotiation, and cognitive flexibility.

These skills fall under the social-emotional quotient (EQ) that concerns one's ability to regulate thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Research shows that these skills play a major role in personal and professional success and well-being. EQ deals with individuals' personal and social competences that affect the way they manage and navigate social complexities. EQ has been said to be the key that differentiates humans from robots, hence lessening the impact of technological unemployment caused by IR4.0.

Because of its significance, many parties consider social-emotional deficiency, particularly in the younger generation, a problem that

“ Given their potential, their unique ability make them particularly suited to benefiting the IR4.0 economy. ”

needs immediate attention. Within this crux lies the "neurodivergent", ie individuals with significant differences in brain functions, thought process, emotions and behavioural traits.

Individuals that may fall under the neurodivergent category includes those with ADHD (attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder), high functioning autism, Asperger's, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. Neurodivergents are traditionally placed under the umbrella of persons with disabilities and neurodivergence is regarded as a "learning

disability". Progress in recent years has seen a more encompassing view towards disability emerge whereby terms such as "differently-abled" or "diverse-abled" are replacing "disability".

Neurodivergent individuals are typically deficient in socioemotional skills that allow them to develop relationships with others. Neurodivergents also tend to be logical, rigid thinkers. Those in the spectrum are also found to be "mind-blind", or lacking the "theory of mind" – the ability to understand and empathise with other people's perspectives and intentions that is crucial in social interactions.

The appeal of neurodivergent individuals as untapped talents is increasingly being recognised. A neurodiversity movement is on the rise in the technology industries in some Western countries. Some of those working in Silicon Valley today as well as famous historical personalities have been diagnosed with or are believed to have atypical neurological conditions.

The neurodivergent have strengths to offer as employees. For

example, individuals with autism may have strong memorisation skills, are very detailed, persistent, conscientious, highly committed, honest and loyal.

Despite their unique thinking abilities, though, the neurodivergent often have to go through painful learning experiences. While those who are formally diagnosed will normally go through therapies to assist them, those who are not tend to suffer in silence and face a rollercoaster of social incidents throughout their lives. However, with the right interventions as well as cooperation from relevant parties, neurodivergents can be taught socioemotional skills so they will have better chances to enter the job market and lead quality lives. Given their potential, their unique ability make them particularly suited to benefiting the IR4.0 economy.

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