

Singapore's climate warrior rallies for change

AMRITAKAUR

A climate rally was held for the first time in Singapore last Saturday to address its worsening effects and encourage people to be more "climate conscious".

Covering Hong Lim Park in a sea of red, over 2,000 people braved the haze and heat to collectively urge the government to take bolder actions in mitigating the climate crisis. The event is the brainchild of National University of Singapore (NUS) student Lad Komal Bhupendra, who was inspired to do something when she realised "there has been no significant changes in our actions to combat climate change".

"There was not a particular incident that made me decide to put together the rally, but a series of similar experiences," said the 19-year-old environmental studies student.

"When I read about climate-related issues affecting countries across the globe, such as heat waves in Europe, rising sea levels, raging Arctic wildfires and news of heavy flooding and crocodiles openly roaming around in my grandparents' neighbourhood in Gujarat, it jolted me."

Ms Komal kept track of such happenings by documenting them on a spreadsheet online and, as she was adding to it, she realised it was "a crisis". She was appalled that while news of such catastrophes was widely reported, people were still not taking the issue seriously and reducing their carbon footprint.

In June, she attended a sharing session on environmental issues organised by an informal environmental group LepakInSG and met some like-minded people.

"I found a group of people who had opinions that resonated with mine; they were equally frustrated as me and felt that more needed to be done to fight climate change," said Ms Komal.

"It was just nice that they felt the same way as me, so in conversation I suggested the idea of holding a rally to raise our voices and push for systemic change in Singapore."

The group reached out to their network of friends and together 15 young activists organised the event last Saturday. The Singapore Climate Rally is the first physical one in Singapore since the international youth climate movement began in August last year.

Last Saturday, most participants turned up in red to signal the gravity of the climate crisis – which Ms Komal described as "an emergency".

They turned up at the Speakers' Corner with posters that bore slogans such as 'Don't burn my future', 'Mission: Less Emission' and 'I'm sure the dinosaurs thought they had time too', signalling the seriousness of the situation.

Ms Komal opened the rally with her speech commenting on the current over-emphasis on individual action: "I don't want the generation younger than me to walk through their school life believing that we can protect the earth by merely increasing the aircon temperature from 19 degrees Celsius to 25 degrees Celsius."

The three-hour rally featured six



Ms Lad Komal Bhupendra and the scene at the inaugural Singapore Climate Rally. PHOTOS: KHALID BABA, DESMOND WEE

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– Ms Lad Komal Bhupendra who spearheaded the inaugural Singapore Climate Rally

speeches, a picnic and a postcard-writing session in which participants sent notes urging stronger climate action to their representatives in Parliament.

Attendees also staged a "die-in" (a form of protest in which participants simulate being dead) – falling one by one, domino-style, lying on the grass in silence as they expressed the lives and biodiversity lost to unabated global warming.

Professor N. Sivasothi, senior lecturer at the NUS Department of Biological Sciences, was one of the speakers at the rally. He urged the importance for Singapore's green cover to be replaced if it is wiped out to build residential or office buildings.

"It doesn't mean we (the developers) cannot compensate for the loss, we should make it a pre-requisite that for the loss incurred, compensatory planting should be required," he said.

While Ms Komal is glad that the government and authorities have plans to protect people from the rising seas, such as the building of polders along the eastern coastline, building Changi Airport Terminal 5 on a higher elevation and pumping in \$400 million into managing and improving our drainage system, she feels more needs to be done to reduce carbon emissions.

Under the Paris Climate Agreement, Singapore pledged to become greener economically and reduce the amount of greenhouse gases emitted to achieve each dollar of gross domestic product by 36 per cent from 2005 levels come 2030.

However, Ms Komal said this target is inadequate and not ambitious enough to limit the global temperature to below 2 degrees Celsius let alone to 1.5 degrees Celsius as required under the agreement. Instead, she hopes the Singapore economy can move on to one that is more reliant on renewable energy and that it can reduce its emissions by 50 per cent by 2030 and net zero by 2050.

Attendee Dr Chitra Krishnakumar,

mate Change's special report and fully divest from polluting industries.

A timely concern now is the "grim haze situation", said Ms Komal.

"Singaporeans need to think beyond the direct impacts of haze and rather than adapt to the situation, try to make changes in our lives."

She recommended Singaporeans to switch to buying Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)-certified products, which come from sustainable sources, as well as use less paper to save the forests.

Ms Komal too is fighting a battle to reduce her carbon footprint.

She has switched to a plant-based diet as scientific reports have found that a high consumption of meat and dairy products fuels global warming.

She is still trying to completely stop using the aircon and bathe without using the heater.

"I hope attendees to the rally feel encouraged to see that they are not alone in the fight against climate change," said Ms Komal. "I hope they recognise that we need to take collective actions in order to push for institutional changes to address the climate crisis."

➔ amritak@sph.com.sg