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Climate change – to act or not to act

MY VIEW -
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THE choice of *TIME*'s Person of the Year is likely to (re)define what 2020 is all about. Greta Thunberg has been quoted saying that it will be the year for action on climate change. Coming at the heels of COP25 which had to do some extended work in Madrid despite a two-week session, it gave the impression that she might be right. It lends credence to her call for action given the on-again, off-again reception from world leaders in their recent deliberations. There has been frustration and disappointment all round, including the UN secretary-general.

The outcomes are still tentative without any clear consensus on how to save the planet. Developing countries are mindful of the “consequences” being shifted to them making their future even more vulnerable when the “real” culprits are not held accountable. Our Ministry of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change deemed that COP25 should be guided by and reflect the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities, in light of different national circumstances under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Paris Agreement.

The ministry issued the statement at the opening plenary of the conference on behalf of the Like-Minded Developing Countries, a grouping of 25 developing countries including China, India, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Egypt and others that form a negotiating bloc in the UN Climate negotiations.

It said that the COP25 outcome must not be mitigation-centric. Adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change and addressing the losses and damages that are incurred can otherwise be insignificant. “While the world now has the Paris Agreement that entered into force in 2016, Malaysia stressed the need to assess the progress of Pre-2020 actions by developed countries under the Convention and the Kyoto Protocol.

“The recent United Nations Environment Programme report shows emissions reductions have been inadequate in particular by developed countries, who should be taking the lead,” the statement said.

Thunberg is clear what she and her generation want. She has created a “global attitudinal shift” as it were, where millions across geopolitical boundaries join hands to force an urgent need for change. Namely, not just a sustainable one but equally an equitable and fair one between the Global North and South. Gone are the days where the latter needs to play catch-up based on the

“standard” set by the former which has been regarded as the very source of the problem way back during the Earth Summit of 1992.

We are reminded of the statement by former UN secretary-general Ban Ki Moon: “There is no Plan B, because there is no Planet B. Period. Thus the standard must be equitable and just for all humanity. In other words, all nations must operate within the limit of one planet in terms of the available finite resources. Countries that have been living on a binge must now recalibrate their lifestyle and return the excesses to those who have been deprived due to some injustices of the past. Correcting historical injustices is a vital aim of global sustainability.”

Unlike previously, this time the call comes louder from the younger generation. Thus, the issue of excess baggage of the past is less pronounced. And by being recognised for it by the UN will facilitate a “new” mindset moving forward. It is heartening to note that they are confidently speaking directly to world leaders and corporate captains many of whom are known to be lukewarm to the consequences of climate change. Some are still in denial. The youth are not shy to engage with them and do not allow themselves to be bullied. This augurs well given their determination to lead the way for a more sustainable future.