

A concerted effort

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DURING the 10th Malaysia Plan, some of Dr Juli Edo's wishes for orang asli education programmes came true.

At the start of the five-year plan in 2010, the associate professor at Universiti Malaya had hoped for more motivational programmes that would show orang asli parents the benefits of education. He had also called for a specialised school where orang asli students with good results could be prepared for tertiary education and leadership roles.

The Kelas Dewasa dan Peribumi (Adult and Peribumi Class) programme was introduced in 2013 and since then, says Department of Orang Asli Development (Jakoa) director-general Datuk Hasnan Hassan, RM6mil has been spent on it every year.

In Peninsular Malaysia, 4,170 adults attend classes for six months,

by the end of which they can read, write, and do basic calculations.

"Some have graduated with flying colours," reports Hasnan. "They have a growing awareness of the importance of education."

There are also centres to improve the performance of orang asli students in Forms 1 through 3. The Pusat Intelpek Pelajar Orang Asli (Orang Asli Students Intellectual Centre) in Kuala Rompin, Pahang, accommodates up to 100 students, providing them with pocket money, school uniforms and transportation.

There is an orang asli vision school, Sekolah Komprehensif (K-9), in Pekan, Pahang. "Parents can visit the children, and there are facilities for them to stay," says Centre for Orang Asli Concerns coordinator Dr Colin Nicholas. "Food is provided. It is a good idea and it should be extended to other schools."

And during the 10MP, 307 orang asli earned university degrees. "Every year we send at least 10 orang asli students overseas for



Hasnan says the Kedap programme has given orang asli parents a growing awareness of the importance of education. Photo: LOW LAY PHON/The Star

Masters and PhDs," says Jakoa's Hasnan.

But access to education for the orang asli should be improved further during the 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP), to be launched in June. Fewer than half of them continue to secondary school.

"There are many reasons why



Orang asli Farah Syahera Chin of SMK Khir Johari, Sungai Sumun, Perak, was one of the top 2014 STPM scorers – she's seen here receiving her award from Malaysian Examinations Council chairman Prof Datuk Dr Mohd Noh Dalimin on March 2. Generally, though, fewer than half of orang asli children at the primary level continue to secondary school. Photo: ART CHEN/The Star

orang asli don't go to school, including poverty and lack of transportation," says Nicholas. "Many have to wake up at 4.30am to go to school, and for those from the interior, almost half have to live in a hostel from the age of seven."

Some of the teachers are not updated with the new curriculum,

he adds, and not all students receive books and uniforms.

Hasnan agrees that more needs to be done.

"The orang asli are not illiterate, but they have gone to school for only a few years," explains Hasnan. "We have to do something, a concerted effort."