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NEWS / Nation

ROADBLOCKS, FLEEING INTO FOREST

VIEW ORANG ASLI MOVES **POSITIVELY**

They are merely trying to curb spread of Covid-19 to their settlements

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THE move by the Orang Asli to abandon their villages and to mount roadblocks following the high number of Covid-19 cases in the country should not be viewed negatively by certain quarters.

Orang Asli Development Department director-general Prof Dr Juli Edo said Malaysians must understand that such moves were initiatives implemented by the Orang Asli community to curb the spread of the virus.

"I would like to advise other members of the society to look at it in a positive way. Do not say that the Orang Asli are not



Kampung Orang Asli Batek in Kuala Koh near Gua Musang appears deserted as its residents have fled deep into the forest. PIC BY RAMLI IBRAHIM

civilised for doing this.

"They have their own way of practising physical distancing. This includes leaving their homes and going to the deep

parts of the jungle or farms, and to block the entrances to their settlements to prevent outsiders from entering," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Juli said similar initiatives had been implemented by the Orang Asli soon after the first Movement Control Order (MCO) began in March.

"This had been done by almost all Orang Asli tribes in the country. They had felt at the time that the move was necessary for their own safety despite having recorded only a few Covid-19 cases in the community.

Juli cited a recent case in which more than 300 Orang Asli residents of Kampung Orang Asli Batek in Kuala Koh, near Gua Musang, fled deep into the forest for the 10th time to escape the Covid-19 pandemic.

"They had refused to meet outsiders, even if it was a minister who had come to their village."

Besides Kelantan, it was also reported that a group of villagers at Kampung Orang Asli Sayong Pinang in Pahang had blocked the entrance to their settlement, in line with the MCO that was implemented by the government on March 18 to curb the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

In many of those instances, the Orang Asli blocked the main road leading to their settlements, set up village patrol units and engaged the People's Volunteer Corps to mount roadblocks to deter visitors.