

# Nostalgia haunts Zainuddin during assemblies

STAR 15 JUN 2003  
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**PETALING JAYA:** Deputy Information Minister Datuk Zainuddin Maidin is still adjusting to being part of the Umno general assembly after decades of reporting and writing about the party from the outside.

Umno general assemblies are occasions when the one-time editor-in-chief of *Utusan Malaysia* has to remind himself that he is there as a special observer and Umno politician, and no longer as a journalist.

But the journalist in him took over last year as mayhem broke out in the majestic Dewan Merdeka following the shock resignation announcement by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

As the drama unfolded on stage, RTM suddenly terminated the live telecast of the proceedings.

Zainuddin, then still a parliamentary secretary, sprang into action. He went up to Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob and asked for permission to resume the live transmission. He got the green light and went on the air to explain what had happened. He also appealed for calm and understanding from the public.

"I think my journalistic instincts took over that day. This was news, it was history in the making," he said.

Zainuddin gets mixed feel-

ings attending assemblies these days. He feels a deep sense of pride at how far Umno has come as well as an inexplicable feeling of loss for the simplicity and sincerity of the old days.

Early Umno assemblies, he recalled, were held at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka complex in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. The delegates came in buses and stayed in cheap hotels. It was the rare Umno delegate who could afford to come by car.

Umno assemblies then also did not get such intensive coverage. There was no media centre and reporters took turns to cover the sitting, rushing back to the office to bang out their stories on their typewriters.

"But one thing that has not changed is that every Malay reporter looks forward to covering the assembly," he said.

One of his most memorable assemblies was when the witch-hunt for alleged leftists and communists in the party was taken to the level of the assembly. He remembered the shock when Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, then the Home Minister, held up a prayer mat which he claimed had a communist emblem.

"The delegates were shocked but most of them did not believe it. In fact, some of them approached us later and said: 'Do they think we are stupid to believe that?'"