



**Triumphant seniors:** The graduates elated at finally receiving their scrolls, throw them up in the air for the camera.

# Grads get scrolls 38 years later



**Welcome!** Dr Mohd Rashdan, the varsity's first vice-chancellor, was invited to present the scrolls to the graduates.

**BY PRIYA KULASAGARAN AND COLLEEN THOR**

educate@thestar.com.my

**I**T SEEMED like any other convocation ceremony at first.

There were the beaming graduates seated in front of the hall, but there was not a gown in sight; only women elegantly dressed in white and men in smart suits.

On stage, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) vice-chancellor Datuk Dr Radin Umar Radin Sohadi made an off-the-cuff remark in the middle of his speech.

"Usually at these events, we don't allow children below 12-

years-old to attend, but today there's an exception; they're here to see their "atuk atuk". This is quite an unprecedented situation," he said to laughter from the audience.

It was indeed a first for the varsity, as the "graduates" were supposed to have had their graduation more than three decades ago! The ceremony held last month was part of a two-day alumni event for UPM's graduates from the cohorts of 1974, 1975, and 1976.

While these alumni received their diplomas, they did not have the chance to have a proper convocation at the time as the institution

was making its transition from the College of Agriculture to Universiti Pertanian Malaysia. The university's name was officially changed to Universiti Putra Malaysia in April 1997. Through its alumni association, the university managed to contact some 630 former graduates, of which 365 alumni members attended.

Adding to the poignant reunion was UPM's first vice-chancellor Prof Emeritus Tan Sri Dr Mohd Rashdan Baba, who was invited to present the scrolls to the graduates.

Cameras flashed away outside the convocation hall while the "graduates" bustled around catch-

ing up with each other.

Getting gentle ribbing from their friends were the numerous couples who had met during their studies at UPM.

"That's right, I met my wife here. She was my course mate," said Zainal Abidin Arshad, who graduated in 1976 with a Diploma in Science with Education, as his wife Zuraidah Hussin smiled shyly beside him.

The 59-year-old retired headmaster added that the institution had done a great job in organising the event.

"There were many great memories here while I was studying for

my diploma.

"That's why it was frustrating that we couldn't celebrate our achievements with a convocation ceremony then, but what could we do?" he said.

Jong Yat Kiong, who graduated in 1975 with a Diploma in Agriculture, said although he still kept in touch with his university mates, the ceremony was a special one.

"I am very happy. It's a bit like a lost and found thing. The feeling you get when you think you've lost something only to find it later - that's the feeling I have right now," said the 58-year-old.