

Rafidah's hug of remorse for Mahathir

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. — It was a brief and tearful embrace.

But with that one act, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz sought to wipe the slate clean and turn the weeks of acrimony between her and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad over the Approved Permits (AP) issue into yesterday's news.

The moment came minutes after the Merdeka Day parade ended, when the VIPs were making their way to their vehicles.

Rafidah walked toward Dr Mahathir and shook hands with the Proton adviser before hugging him.

Several Cabinet Ministers and VIPs, who witnessed the scene, applauded approvingly. An aide of Dr Mahathir said he heard Rafidah seeking forgiveness from the former prime minister.

"She said something to this

effect, '*saya minta maaf, Tun*' (I am sorry, Tun). Tun (Mahathir) smiled and said, '*sabar, sabar*' (be patient)."

Rafidah then held tightly to Dr Mahathir's hand before seeing him and Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Ali to their car.

Earlier, the Wanita Umno chief hugged Dr Siti Hasmah

and wept. The entire episode lasted less than five minutes and caught everyone by surprise.

"It was one hell of a touching moment," said a deputy minister. "I am happy to see that they are friends again."

One parliamentary secretary said Dr Mahathir looked "*tidak selesa*" (uncomfortable) when Rafidah hugged him. "He was just smiling. I guess everything between them is now over and done with.

This happy ending should be good for everyone."

Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim captured the poignant moment on film.

In May, Dr Mahathir had questioned the issuance of APs for imported vehicles, saying it was hurting national car Proton, and asked for the list of AP holders to be made public.