

Rafidah hugs Dr Mahathir

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PUTRAJAYA: Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz made her first public show of reconciliation with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday by hugging him, and giving him what seemed to be a teary explanation about their strained relationship.

The International Trade and Industry Minister had a very public fallout with her former boss over the Approved Permit issue and had steadfastly refused to apologise to Dr Mahathir over their spat. Yesterday's public hug took place in front of the VVIP tent at the Boulevard after the 48th National Day parade here.

The King, Queen, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak had just left in their cars.

Rafidah first approached Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali as she was walking towards her car and embraced her. According to witnesses, the two women engaged in a very animated conversation for several minutes before Rafidah rushed up to Dr Mahathir, who was walking in front of them.

One minister who saw the incident said Rafidah first reached for Dr Mahathir's hand and moved closer to him before suddenly hugging him tightly, to his surprise. She then burst into tears.

"She was talking very fast as Dr Mahathir listened attentively. From the expression on her face, it could be about some serious matters but Dr Mahathir was smiling all the time," said a deputy minister. The deputy minister, who witnessed the entire incident from his position on the elevated VVIP tent, said Dr Mahathir then patted Rafidah on the shoulder and got into his car, escorted by her.

A VIP said several ministers and deputy ministers nearby who also saw the incident burst into spontaneous applause, as Cultural, Arts and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim, an avid photographer, captured the moments.



“Rafidah gave everyone a big smile and was again her bouncy self as she waved enthusiastically at the stunned onlookers,” said the deputy minister. Scores of journalists who saw the tail-end of the incident rushed up to Dr Mahathir, who despite having one leg in the car, patiently waited for them. However, when asked about the conversation between him and Rafidah, Dr Mahathir flashed his trademark broad smile and simply said: “No ... no ... nothing.” The pressmen then looked around for Rafidah, but the Wanita Umno chief was nowhere to be seen. When approached by *The Star* at her Damansara Heights home, a smiling Rafidah declined to reveal what she had spoken to Dr Mahathir about. Initially, the guard outside her house refused to let the reporter in but when it started to rain, Rafidah appeared with her husband, Datuk Mohamed Basir Ahmad.

“What are you doing here? It is raining so heavily,” she remarked.

“No, no, no. Please don’t ask me anything. It’s a public holiday and this is my private house,” she said when asked what she had said to Dr Mahathir. As she was about to drive away, she wound down the window and offered the transport-less reporter a lift back to *The Star* office in Petaling Jaya. In the car, she was very cheerful, as though a heavy burden had been lifted from her shoulders. Still, she was not willing to talk about anything related to work. “I treasure my precious little personal time that I get with my family,” she said.

