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114 Umno chiefs protest Raja Ariffin's appointment

ALOR STAR, Mon. - A total of 114 Umno branch chiefs in the Baling division have protested the appointment of Datuk Raja Ariffin Raja Sulaiman as the division's chief.

The group's spokesman Wan Mahmud Wan Ibrahim said a letter to this effect was sent to party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday.

Wan Mahmud, who is the Kampung Tiak branch chairman and Baling division committee member, handed over a similar letter to Menteri Besar and State Umno chief Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain this evening.

Raja Ariffin was appointed to replace Datuk Zainol Md Isa, who was removed from the post upon being found guilty by the Umno disciplinary board of practising money politics during the April divisional elections.

On May 21, the supreme council endorsed the disciplinary board's decision to remove Zainol and appointed Raja Ariffin as the division chief.

Zainol had defeated Raja Ariffin by 107 votes in a straight fight for the post on April 28.

Wan Mahmud said the letter of protest which had been submitted to the party leaders was signed by the 114 branch chiefs. There are 152 branches in the Baling division.

He said in the letter, the branch chiefs had also sought an explanation for Raja Ariffin's appointment.

Wan Mahmud said the appointment was not in line with provisions in the party's constitution.

"We are questioning the appointment of the Baling Umno division chief because it goes against the party's constitution.

"According to Article 15.7 of the constitution, the division should be headed by the deputy chief if the division chief was unable to carry out his duties because he was fired, was in bad health or had passed away.

"In turn, if the deputy was unable to carry out his duties, his place would be taken over by the division's vice chief," he said.

He added that according to the Umno constitution, the division chief's post should be held by the deputy until a new division chief was chosen in an election.

Wan Mahmud said in addition, the group also questioned Raja Ariffin's state of health and his ability to lead the division.

Meanwhile, Raja Ariffin, in a response to the protest letter, said he was only abiding by the supreme council's decision and would leave the matter in the hands of the national leaders.

Asked on allegations that he was unwell and unfit to lead the division, he said:

"(They) will have to come and see for themselves whether I can work or not ... not make wild accusations."

Syed Razak could not be contacted for comment while Zainol declined comment when contacted.

(END)