

Utusan journalists threaten to picket at Umno meet
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The *Utusan Malaysia* chapter of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) will hold a 'peaceful picket' during the Umno general assembly if the company fails to sign the new collective agreement before 6pm on March 23.

NUJ Utusan chairperson Amran Ahmad said in a statement that negotiations have yet to be concluded with the company which is owned by Umno, although the collective agreement expired last year.

Amran said the picket, aimed at highlighting the plight of unionised staff, was endorsed by the majority of the exco members at a meeting on March 11.

"Umno, as the owner of the company must lend a hand to help fulfil the union's demands. We have sent letters to the Umno president, deputy president and a few Umno ministers, but there has been no reply," he said.

"This picket is the right way to communicate and tell them our problems."

The Umno general assembly will begin on March 24.

The union had held a picket in 2004 (*right*) also protesting the delay in concluding negotiations.

'We won't budge'

Among NUJ Utusan's demands are a 10 percent salary adjustment, a minimum RM5 annual salary increment, additional monthly transport allowance of RM50 and status quo for other benefits in the last agreement which expired on July 31 last year.

Amran said NUJ Utusan would not budge from the 10 percent salary adjustment because other media companies have paid out even more.

"I don't think our demand is too much as it is still below what (employees of) *Star* and the (New Straits Times Press) group are getting.

"We are confident that the company has the resources to pay what we are asking (given that) they are going to (put up) a new building costing RM60 million next year."

Star is said to have adjusted salaries by between five and 14 percent, and *NST* by 12 percent.

NUJ Utusan represent almost 300 journalists, photographers and graphic artists from the editorial department of Utusan Melayu (M) Bhd which publishes *Utusan Malaysia*, *Mingguan Malaysia* and *Kosmo!*