Nutrien gets temporary Point Lisas access as NGC waives $28M port fees

Nutrien plant in Point Lisas PHOTO BY RISHI RAGOONATH

GEISHA KOWLESSAR-ALONZO SENIOR REPORTER GEISHA.KOWLESSAR@GUARDIAN.CO.TT

The National Gas Company (NGC) has agreed to waive its US$28 million claim in retroactive port fees from global fertiliser giant Nutrien Ltd, amidst a threat of legal action by the Canadian company.

The parties also reached an interim agreement granting Nutrien unrestricted access to port facilities until December 31, a temporary but vital reprieve.

The agreement came after Nutrien moved to initiate legal action. However, litigation was aborted after high-level talks involving NGC, Nutrien and the National Energy Corporation (NEC), aimed at averting a crisis at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, were called.

Efforts are now underway to restart Nutrien's Trinidad Nitrogen operations, though full functionality may not be restored until today.

However, sources said the situation is not yet fully resolved, as low gas supply remains an ongoing challenge.

The resolution to restart comes at a critical moment, as escalating tensions had threatened to disrupt ammonia and urea production at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate—key contributors to the nation's petrochemical exports.

It also comes as a sigh of relief to the 600 workers whose jobs were on the line.

On Tuesday, Nutrien announced that it would initiate a controlled shutdown of its Point Lisas plant starting today, citing ongoing challenges with port access restrictions and unreliable natural gas supply.

"This shutdown is in response to port access restrictions imposed by T&T's NEC and a lack of reliable and economic natural gas supply that has reduced the free cash flow contribution of the Trinidad Nitrogen operations over an extended period of time. Nutrien will continue to engage with stakeholders and assess options with respect to its operations in Trinidad," the company had explained.

The announcement also sparked concerns over potential job losses.

However, the situation shifted dramatically following an emergency meeting yesterday involving key stakeholders, with a resolution leading to Nutrien withdrawing its application for an interim injunction against the NEC, which it had filed the day before.

Government officials indicated that all parties are committed to moving forward collaboratively, as they reached an interim agreement allowing Nutrien uninhibited access to the port facilities until December 31.

This was confirmed by attorney Gerald Ramdeen, NGC's chairman, who told Guardian Media the NEC was served with an application for an injunction by Nutrien early yesterday. However, he said, following a high-level meeting involving key stakeholders, including himself, NEC director Dr Rampersad Motilal; NGC acting president Edmund Subryan, Nutrien vice-president and managing director Edmond Thompson, and Nutrien senior vice-president of Nitrogen Operations Dean Perkins, it was then agreed Nutrien would not proceed with the injunction.

Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, former energy minister and industry expert, underscored the importance of the resolution.

"Companies like Nutrien are vital to the petrochemical sector and the wider economy. Our objective must be to restore them to optimum capacity to boost foreign exchange earnings and protect jobs," she said.

"Every time production is cut, the workforce is affected. These companies support a wide range of professions—from engineering and IT to accounting and management."

What happens after December 31?

Ramdeen noted that all parties have agreed to enter into negotiations, with several outstanding issues still to be addressed. He emphasised the Government's commitment to resolving these matters in a timely and constructive manner.

"And therefore, in our meeting this morning, we indicated that we've offered to start those negotiations as soon as next week to be able to resolve those issues. All of the companies on the Point Lisas Estate, which the National Gas Company treats with, are important to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. And what is most important is that the business of the National Gas Company and the subsidiary companies are run in such a manner that it brings the best returns to the people of this country," Ramdeen said.

Speaking on the issue of NGC engaging Proman—global leader in methanol, fertiliser, and other products—regarding port fees, Ramdeen said the Government is open to discussions with all users of the NEC facilities and all customers of the NGC.

He said this engagement is deemed necessary because several contracts are due to expire at the end of this year, adding the goals of these discussions are to ensure the country's business runs efficiently and that the companies deliver the best return to the people of T&T.

Furthermore, in line with the Government's policy, Ramdeen said they are actively working to make the Point Lisas Estate as attractive as possible to all investors.