Construction sector braces for TCL price shock

Rock Hard pledges to maintain prices

A TCL forklift moves a pallet of bagged cement at the company's facility in February 2024.

Rock Hard Cement is affirming its commitment to holding its prices steady, even as T&T's construction sector braces for what can be a significant cost shock, following local cement producer, TCL's signal that it intends to increase its prices.

Managing director of Rock Hard Trinidad, Ryan Ramhit, told the Sunday Business Guardian no price increase is on the horizon unless its own operating costs change drastically.

"There's no increase in price in the foreseeable future. Of course, if something drastic happens to affect my end price, my end cost...

Rock Hard is here to support T&T.

So, I will always do my best to ensure that my prices are low so I can bring affordable cement into the entire country," he said.

This stance stands in sharp contrast to Trinidad Cement Ltd (TCL), which is expected to raise prices by mid February.

TCL's pending price movement is directly tied to ongoing negotiations with the National Gas Company (NGC), which has proposed a 77 per cent increase in natural gas prices, effective February 1, 2026.

Contractors told the Sunday Business Guardian that "unofficially," the anticipated increase in TCL's cement prices could be between 15 and 20 per cent, though the final adjustment has not been announced.

When contacted on Friday, Bhagwansingh's Hardware, one of T&T's largest chains, said a bag of TCL cement retails for $68 VAT inclusive while a bag of Rock Hard cement sells for $62 VAT inclusive.

Natural gas is a key input in cement manufacturing, and the proposed price hike has triggered industry wide concern, with ripple effects already being felt across production schedules, supply chains, and project costing.

The pressure is not limited to cement producers.

In a letter dated January 28, 2026, ABEL Building Solutions (ABS)—one of the nation's largest clay and concrete block manufacturers—also warned customers that rising prices of natural gas, packaging, and transportation had strained operations throughout 2025.

ABS confirmed it increased prices last year and signalled that further adjustments may become unavoidable if NGC's proposal is implemented.

The company made clear that it does not support the proposed gas hike and is actively engaging NGC and industry stakeholders to highlight its sweeping implications.

It also underscored that energy-dependent manufacturers operate with thin margins and sudden input spikes could destabilise both production capacity and consumer affordability.

Amid this uncertainty, Rock Hard has reported strong market performance since re-entering the T&T market last year.

"It has been good—very good," Ramhit said, noting full customer support upon the brand's return.

Even in the post-election period marked by caution, he maintained sales have remained steady.

Cement price rise expected to fuel industry-wide increases

Even without final confirmation from TCL, industry sentiment is unified: an increase in the price of cement would mean higher costs across the board.

"Once cement goes up, everything goes up," said former president of the T&T Contractors Association (TTCA) Mikey Joseph explained, adding, "Ready mix, premix, concrete blocks, foundation blocks—every single component that relies on cement will be affected."

The impact would stretch beyond building materials. Companies that produce blended construction chemicals, adhesives, and specialty products using TCL cement may also need to adjust pricing.

These secondary effects mean that the increase would be felt in residential construction, commercial development and largescale infrastructural projects.

As the Government accelerates its pledge to deliver affordable housing for ordinary citizens, Joseph also expressed concern over the durability and overall quality of newly constructed units, noting that while thousands of homes have been completed under the national housing programme, reports from several communities indicate that many structures are not holding up as expected.

The Joint Consultative Council for the Construction Industry (JCC), the umbrella body representing planners, contractors, engineers, and the T&T Contractors Association (TTCA), warned that the price adjustments would affect both government and private projects, ultimately filtering down to consumers.

Noting that TCL remains the dominant—or in practical terms, sole—supplier of locally produced cement, JCC president Fazir Khan said, "Government should continue the policy of open competition.

It is always the best thing for the consumer…Once the Government policy encourages competition, there is going to be some sort of levelling of the playing field in terms of the cost."

Beyond rising material costs, the sector is also struggling with ongoing late government payments—problems that have historically occurred during transitions between administrations.

"Make sure contractors get their monies on time," Khan stressed.

Businessman and construction industry leader Emile Elias agreed the country is entering an unavoidable period of economic adjustment as global conditions shift and long-standing local challenges emerge more sharply.

"The construction industry just has to face that reality," he said.

Elias emphasised that "adjustment" is the key word that should guide national thinking in the months ahead as he urged industries to focus on efficiency, innovation and smarter operations rather than dwelling on price increases.

"We just have to accept the increase and find ways to work more efficiently," he added.

Economic implications of cement price hike

The impending cement price increase by TCL presents a significant challenge to national development efforts, particularly as cement remains a foundational input for infrastructure.

This issue becomes even more pressing in the context of the Government's ongoing revitalisation plan, which depends heavily on stable construction costs and pre-dictable material flows.

Former Works and Transport Minister Rohan Sinanan stated an impending price hike acts as a direct inflationary pressure on the revitalisation plan as it increases the "cost to build," which can lead to budget overruns or a reduction in the scope of essential projects.

"To mitigate this, the Government must focus on high-efficiency project management to ensure that increased material costs do not derail the overall timeline or financial viability of the plan," Sinanan said.

The former minister added that there must also be a clear understanding that the proposed cement price increase will not only affect the revitalisation plan and its projects but the every-day activities of citizens seeking to build shelter and do business.

"A way needs to be developed to address the spin-off effects.

Also while today it may be cement there needs to be an understanding that as we move ahead with any plan there will be a run on resources leading to a heating up of a number of sectors," said Sinanan Despite these challenges, the former minister said the broader revitalisation plan remains feasible; provided two core pillars are strengthened: return on investment (ROI) and foreign exchange convertibility.

"Projects must generate returns that surpass their financing costs, ensuring long-term sustainability rather than short-term momentum.

Equally important is the ability of investors to convert local earnings into foreign currency.

"In the current global environment, clarity and predictability around foreign exchange access is essential for securing external financing, facilitating imports of materials and technology, and maintaining investor confidence," Sinanan further suggested.

He rejected the idea of pausing the national plan, arguing that economic stagnation would carry a greater long-term cost than inflation-related pressures. Instead, he called for recalibration—urging the Government to prioritise high return on investment projects, strengthen fiscal discipline, reduce bureaucratic waste and ensure a transparent pathway to foreign exchange stability.

Plan not affected— Minister

In a very brief response to Guardian Media outside Parliament on Friday, Works and Transport Minister Jearlean John was confident the revitalisation plan would not be affected.

"It doesn't. It gets better," John said, before walking off when asked how the impending cement increase would affect the plan.