

Namdeb and MUN to hammer out a deal

■ **CORRY INHUA**

NAMDEB'S management yesterday met members of the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN) in a bid to end an industrial strike that will have cost the company N\$8 million if the issue is not resolved today.

Yesterday, management issued a press statement, after remaining mum on the issue on Tuesday when the strike commenced, saying that the two parties were now meeting to seek an amicable solution.

Information on how far the negotiations went was not available as all relevant contact persons from both parties were still negotiating at the time of going to press.

But Namdeb's Brand Manager, Pauline Thomas, said in a media release that approximately 50% of the employees in the bargaining unit were on strike and that some who were not in essential services also opted to go to work during the strike.

The stoppage stems from an unsuccessful conciliation process about the MUN's demand for double housing benefits for Bogenfels Mine employees. The two parties could not agree on the issue, with the company considering the demand as too costly and instead proposing that the affected workers must at least pay minimal rent and retain the remaining housing and utility al-

lowance.

But on Tuesday, the union said there was more to their grievances and claimed that the employees were in fact fed up with management and the Board of Directors in which they say they have lost trust and confidence.

But Thomas yesterday argued that "any other issue that is being raised during the current industrial action, other than the Bogenfels dispute, is required to follow the stipulated conflict handling process, first internally and, if unresolved, externally."

She said that was the route that has resulted in the MUN initiating industrial action

regarding the Bogenfels housing and utility allowance issue.

"The Bogenfels issue followed a route of various internal engagements as well as dispute resolution meetings which required external intervention."

Regarding the loss, Thomas said: "It is estimated roughly that Namdeb lost N\$4 million yesterday (Tuesday) and will lose the same amount every day the strike continues."

She reiterated that the industrial strike was illegal and the company is likely to enforce the "No Work - No Pay" principle against those who went on strike without voting.

Namdeb considers approaching court

• LUQMAN CLOETE

NAMDEB says it is considering approaching the courts to declare a strike by its workers illegal or to commence with a lockout.

The company and the Mineworkers' Union of Namibia have different versions about the legality of the strike which ended its second day yesterday.

On Tuesday the union hit back at Namdeb for declaring the strike – which results in an estimated loss of around N\$4 million a day – illegal.

Namdeb Brand Manager, Pauline Thomas,

said yesterday “The company’s position is that such industrial action will be illegal as it is based on a flawed ballot process as not only the Bogenfels employees participated in the ballot process”.

Thomas said about 50 per cent of 1 373 employees in the bargaining unit went on strike even though only 124 workers affected by the closure of the Bogenfels mine operations were eligible to participate in the ballot because the dispute centred on the housing and utility benefits they will forfeit once they move to other Namdeb operations.

On Tuesday MUN issued a damning media statement and insisted that the strike was legal.

“The strike at Namdeb is not about housing allowances but that of rent and safety. The company and the union have already settled the payment of housing and utility allowances as a grandfathered allowance (allowance payable to workers living in Namdeb hostels) which is personal to holder,” the statement reads.

The union stated Bogenfels is just a mining site and does not employ anyone, therefore the employees it referred to are in fact employed by Namdeb “and not Bogenfels”.

The union explained the safety issue relates to two fatalities at Namdeb this year and one

“near death” caused by alleged “non-adherence to standards” (safety standards) due to cost cutting measures, and the company’s alleged reluctance to remove managers whom the union felt are putting workers’ lives at risk.

The union also highlighted threats to employees to sign “inferior contracts” with illegal retrenchment notices and the company’s failure to fill more than 100 vacancies because of poly-graph testings as factors that had contributed to the strike.

“The company has gone so far as retrenching two employees for seven days,” the statement reads.

Responses on issues of the day

 **IRREBEL** It is ridiculous that employees are using the accommodation as a scapegoat. How do you want to occupy a company house plus you want to get house allowance? It does not make sense to me.

'Namdeb strike illegal'

By Magreth Nunuhe

WINDHOEK—Namdeb Diamond Corporation says a strike involving hundreds of its workers is illegal "as it was based on a flawed process."

It says the strike included workers who were not employed at Bogenfels at the time the labour dispute started.

The industrial action is part of an unsuccessful arbitration process which led to the Mine Workers' Union (MUN) demanding housing benefits for Bogenfels employees," said line Thomas, Namdeb's general manager. "On any other issue

NAMDEB

being raised during the current strike (other than Bogenfels dispute) needs to follow the "stipulated conflict-handling process" which would start internally before it goes external.

According to Thomas, the unresolved dispute between Namdeb and the union stems from the company maintaining that Bogenfels employees are to choose between free company accommodation without housing and utility allowance, while the union

demanding that the employees retain housing and utility allowance and be provided free single accommodation.

She added that the company's position is that workers could retain their housing and utility allowance and pay minimal charges while retaining the remaining housing and utility allowance.

Thomas said approximately 50 per cent of Namdeb employees are on strike and the company lost N\$4 million on Tuesday and would continue to incur financial

MUN President John Ndeutapo said they could reach a stalemate as the Bogenfels case is not the only issue at stake.

"The biggest issue is management, the manner in which they are conducting business," he added, saying that the strike is indefinite.

Ndeutapo said the union's position is very clear and needs a definite solution.

He maintained that the strike is legal and questioned why Namdeb is trying to

give employees retrenchment packages while the company has not shut down its operations.

He said some of the employees at Bogenfels have worked at Namdeb for more than 20 years and have changed sites many times.

"In a construction company, you don't retrench workers just because the building is complete," he added.

She said

'Bal in myn, vakbond se hande'

• Dani Booysen

ONVERPOOSDE bemiddeling kon teen sakterd steeds nie 'n einde bring aan 'n staking by Namdeb wat vandag sy derde dag kan betree nie.

Teen middernag sou verliese die N\$8 miljoen-merk verbystek.

Namdeb se aandrang dat dit 'n onwettige staking is, is egter deur die Arbeidskommissaris, mnr. Bro-Mathew Shinguadja, bevraagteken. "Die staking is wettig," het hy gesê. "Die interpretasie (dat dit 'n onwettige staking is) is die maatskappy s'n," het hy gesê, "behalwe as hulle skriftelike bewyse tot die teendeel kan voorlê."

Volgens die Arbeidskommissaris is al 1 373 werkers in een bedingingsenheid ingesluit, wat

betekén dat ander nie verhoed kan word om saam met Bogenfels se 124 herontplooië werkers oor hul behuisingstoelae te staak nie. Volgens me. Pauline Thomas, Namdeb se handelsmerkbestuurder, is die erkenningsooreenkoms met die Mynwerkersunie van Namibië (MUN) egter duidelik dat net geraakte werkers mag staak.

Teen gister het die diamantreus aanvanklike berekeninge oor hoeveel werkers staak aansienlik

aangepas. Die "niet-geïdentifiseerde" werkers – diegene uitgesluit wat noodsaaklike dienste verrig – het Dinsdag gaan werk met 'n geskatte 700 werkers wat die stewels opgehang het.

"Niks is opgelos nie," het mnr. Shavuka Mbidhi, MUN-takvoorsitter, gesê. "Waar is die res van die

mense dan?" was sy kommentaar op Namdeb se aanvanklike som dat net 'n paar honderd mense staak. "Daar vind geen produksie plaas nie."

Die vakbond het Namdeb daarvan beskuldig dat een aanleg onwettig heropen is. Me. Thomas wou nie op die aantyging reageer nie.

"Die bemiddelaar gesels stykdeur met die partye," het mnr. Shinguadja benadruk. "Ons weet almal maatskappye en vakbonde bereken verliese tydens 'n staking,

omdat werkers ook nie volgens wettig betaal hoef te word nie. Partye weet dit uit die staanspoor. "Om nie vakbond se eise te aanvaar nie om te staak, is hul reg," het die Arbeidskommissaris benadruk. "Dit is vir hulle om die geskil by te lê. Ons het gedoen wat ons kon