

Trinidad and Tobago General Election Could Take Place in September, Hints Finance Minister

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PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad, CMC – A senior government minister on Wednesday hinted at the possibility of the general elections due in Trinidad and Tobago later this year being held in the month of September.

Finance Minister Colm Imbert, who has served as prime minister on numerous occasion since the ruling People's National Movement *(PNM) won the September 7, 2015, told a parliamentary committee that there is a possibility that the elections could be held before September 30 this year.

Imbert, told the Standing Finance Committee hearing on the increase of TT\$43 million (One TT dollar=US\$0.16 cents) for the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) as part of its preparation for the election.

“In this fiscal year, we already have had one election, the Local Government election of November 2019 and it is likely, possible that there may be an election before the end of this fiscal year by September 30,” Imbert said.

He told the Committee in anticipation of that possibility “the Ministry of Finance looked at expenditure over the years with respect to a general election and has come up with this supplementary appropriation for the EBC in the possibility that there may be a general election before the end of September 30.

“It is all in the realm of possibility. We are taking in front as it were using the local parlance and making the accommodation for the EBC “in the possibility of an election before the 30th of September”.

Imbert brushed aside remarks by opposition legislator Dr. Roodal Moonilal that there was more to the provision of the funds.

“Today we are told that we need TT\$43 million more for the EBC because the minister got it wrong with his 2020 figures. Is this another case of the level of incompetence or is it that something is happening at Scott’s House (EBC headquarters) that we are not aware of that they require additional monies in excess of TT\$105 million budgeted?

But Imbert said it is routine that when the budget is presented during the fiscal year there will be adjustments based on assessments of the situation.

“We are simply making sure that the EBC has enough money to deal with a possible general election which may occur before the 30th of September,” he added.

Last weekend, Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley rubbished a threat by Opposition Leader Kamla Persad Bissessar of legal action should he name the date for a general election with the country’s borders still closed as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

“All I could say to that is that Trinidad and Tobago has a responsible government and that government observes the law and the supreme law in this country is the Constitution. The Constitution determines how and when an election could be called and it has nothing to do with the fuddles of any opposition leader,’ Rowley told a news conference.

General elections are due no later than November this year, and while Rowley has not given any indication as to when the PNM would seek a new mandate from the population, he did last week indicate that the Parliament would be dissolved in July.

Under the Constitution, an election must be called within 90 days of the dissolution of the 41-member Parliament.

In the last general election, the PNM won 23 of the 41 seats while the coalition People’s Partnership of with the main opposition United National Congress (UNC) as its biggest partner, won the remaining 18 seats.