

■ Imbert:

Mid-year review depends on election timing

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THE Finance Ministry is preparing its mid-year budget review as scheduled, but it may be impacted depending on when the election bell is rung, says Finance Minister Colm Imbert.

On September 30, 2024, Imbert presented the \$59.7 billion 2024/2025 budget in a historic five-hour and 44-minute speech in the House of Representatives.

At the commissioning of mobile scanners at the Port of Port of Spain yesterday, the *Express* asked the minister if a mid-year review would take place in the first quarter of 2025. He responded that it would depend on the timing of the elections.

He noted that the mid-year review is typically around April or May, and his predecessor had held mid-year reviews as late as June.

'Of course, we are planning for a mid-year review, but I can't tell you when elections will be,' he said.

The minister explained that the budget is an estimate and, therefore, unforeseen circumstances may arise that require adjustments.

Frequent letters to CAL

When asked about Caribbean Airlines' (CAL) failure to submit its annual reports for the past nine years, Imbert responded: 'That is true. The fact is, my Investments Division has been writing to Caribbean Airlines for a long time. They had some issues with their auditors, apparently. They receive letters frequently and have promised to do better and bring their financials up to date.'

Imbert added that while he frequently writes to CAL's chairman, Ronnie Mohammed, it is the chief executive officer who is ultimately accountable.

The *Express* reported that Caribbean Airlines Ltd has not submitted its annual reports to the Minister of Finance for the past nine years-spanning from 2016 to 2024. This admission was made by CAL in its response to a Freedom of Information (FOI) request filed by Ravi Balgobin Maharaj.

In response, Maharaj, through his attorneys at Freedom Law Chambers, sent the state enterprise a pre-action protocol letter dated December 18, 2024, challenging its 'ongoing failure...to comply with its obligations' under section 3.2.5 of the *State Enterprises Performance Monitoring Manual 2011*, established by the Ministry of Finance. This section mandates that the company lay an annual report in Parliament via the responsible minister by law.

ANR Robinson Airport to open next month When asked if his ministry has achieved its legislative agenda given that Parliament is set to dissolve in August, Imbert said they had done almost everything needed.

'Our main goal was getting compliant with the Global Forum, and we passed all the legislation and signed all the orders... so by June, we should be fully compliant,' he said.

Regarding the operationalisation of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority (TTRA) before the general election, Imbert replied: 'I certainly hope so.'

When questioned about whether ANR Robinson International Airport is on track to open at the end of March, Imbert said it would be opened 'in March.'

'It is really a celebration of practical completion because the airport itself wouldn't be operational until later in the year. It will be a celebration, but that's a prime ministerial thing, so I wouldn't want to say too much,' he explained.

Asked if he hoped Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley would open the airport before resigning and handing over to Stuart Young, Imbert said: 'I expect him to, but that's a prime ministerial thing; you better talk to him about it.'