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Purchase order vital to claim for payments, businesses warned

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BUSINESSES must insist on being issued with a purchase order (PO) for all government dealings before they can receive payments, a senior Ministry of Finance official said.

Maswadi Hj Mohsin (**pictured**), acting deputy accountant-general at the Ministry of Finance's Treasury Department, said many businesses are not aware of the need to be issued a PO by the government agency involved in the business transaction.

At the Darussalam Enterprise (DARE) focus group session on late payments yesterday, several companies raised their concerns on late payments from the government even after submitting their letter of award.

Maswadi said even if the business has received a letter of award from the department or ministry, companies still need to insist on getting a PO. "Once businesses are awarded the tender, they need to insist on getting a purchase order from the department, because it is a way to show the department has committed the money.

"With a purchase order, it shows that money within the department or ministry's budget is already allocated for that procurement," he told *The Brunei Times* on the sidelines of the dialogue.

The acting deputy accountant-general said the Ministry of Finance strictly advises vendors not to merely accept letters of award only, but also a purchase order.

"If you do not ask for the purchase order, it is your risk of not being paid," he said.

After businesses have received the PO and have delivered what is specified in the tender, they will also need to submit an invoice with all the details to the government agency.

Following the submission of the invoice, they will then again have to insist on getting an invoice tracking notification slip.

He said the purpose of invoice tracking is for companies to know the stage or status of their payment.

However, receiving the notification slip is not good enough to receive payment because the respective department will need to do the checking and certification by relevant authorities within the department.

“Only when all these are done, the finance unit under the department or ministry issue the payment voucher to the Treasury Department,” he explained.

“So companies need to provide all the proper documents when they submit their invoices. They need to attach the PO, letter of award and progress claim. Companies have the responsibility to attach the documents required. The department will then have to make sure all the documents are there too,” he continued.

Maswadi said businesses can always call the Treasury Department’s hotline at 2383444, where officers will answer the queries and check on the status of the payment in their system.

“Every part of the payment process - from the vendor receiving a purchase order, submitting an invoice and getting a notification slip, to getting the documents certified and checked by the department and having a payment voucher issued - is in Treasury Accounting Financial Information System (TAFIS),” he said.

“Any process of a payment will be tracked in TAFIS. The businesses will be able to find out if their payment process is currently in the preparation of payment voucher stage or certification by officers stage,” he added.

Maswadi said in the process of payment, the Treasury Department uses TAFIS for the payment to be made within 30 days.

However, he said there are some departments that require a lot of certification processes.

“I hope these departments will then inform the vendors on their required processes and how long it will take, so that at least businesses will know how long it will take to receive their payment,” he said.

Maswadi went on to say that mistakes in the submitted invoices submitted can also delay payments.

“If there are mistakes in the invoicing, payment may take longer because the company will have to amend it and resubmit the invoice to the respective department.

“The 30 days of payment are for invoices that have been submitted along with all the completed and accurate documents,” he continued.

Once the Treasury Department receives the payment voucher from the department and nothing is wrong with any of the documentation, payment will be done within one to three working days.

“When it comes to payment from the Treasury Department, what we require is the original voucher, the purchase order and supporting documents on approvals from the department’s authorities,” he said.

The acting deputy accountant-general said helping SMEs grow and flourish is a uniformed government interest.

“SMEs are the engine for growth and we will try as much as possible, to help SMEs get their payment as quickly as possible.”

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