Reusing, recycling and buying in bulk to keep stationery costs down in 2014

BY TAN YI LIANG

PETALING JAYA: Reuse, recycle and buy in bulk - these are the tips The Star Online has received when it comes to handling the mountain of expenses parents of school-going children are facing as the new school year draws closer along with a spike in the price of basic stationery items, such as pens, pencils and paper just two days away.

"There are many things that can be reused from the previous years. Go look and see what can be salvaged to cut down costs," said Parent Action Group for Education (PAGE) chairman, Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim.

Noor Azimah gave an example of what she does at her home with her children.

We reuse exercise books from the previous year by reusing their good pages as rough paper. It is all about being creative in how you reuse and recycle items instead..."
of throwing them at the end of the year - this is especially true when it comes to stationery. You don't have to buy a new box of colour pencils or art blocks every year," she said.

Datin Noor Azimah Abdul Rahim

Stationery prices are expected to go up by 20% to 30% within the first quarter of next year, with Federation of Stationers and Booksellers Association of Malaysia president Tey Tong Sing saying price increases for stationery products are necessary as other costs were already on the rise, adding that the increase, which is likely to kick in March is necessary to help offset rising costs faced by the industry.

Tan had pointed out that about 90% of stationery and books sold here are imported from China, he said, adding that since fuel prices went up recently, freight fee had also gone up by about 30%.

On the proposed hike itself, Noor Azimah criticised it, calling on stationery sellers to also consider spurring customer goodwill by putting lower costs on goods.

"I think the rising price of stationery is bad, everyone seems to be passing on the added costs to consumers, it is the most convenient thing to do. But costs can be managed to a minimum. How about taking a cut in your profits instead of maximising them. Customer goodwill is important too," said Noor Azimah.

Similar advice was shared by University of Malaya Educational Psychology and Counselling Department associate professor Mariani Mohd Nor, who urged parents to exercise caution and shop within their means when preparing their children for their return to school in 2014.

Mariani said parents do not have to dress their children in designer goods, especially if they cannot afford such items and urged parents to not compete with other parents to provide such items for their children.

"If parents can afford, it is not a problem, but concern arises when parents who cannot afford, but still want their children to have all the luxurious and stylish goods, go to the extent of pawning other household needs," she said when interviewed by Bernama on Sunday.

Mariani added children could understand their parents' hardship and financial burden if parents took the initiative to explain to them the real financial situation of their
"Children have pliable minds and if they are aware of their parents burden, they will feel sorry and concede to some extent," she said.

Meanwhile, several parents such as 35-year old housewife Lin Hassan said that she would buy store-brand stationery in bulk from Tesco for her daughter to keep costs down.

"It is in bulk, rubbers and pencils can be bought in big boxes so it is a lot cheaper. They also sell art blocks very cheaply. Mydin is also a good place to buy cheap stationery," she said.

Tesco was also recommended by 27-year old journalist Pauline Wong, who also recommended bulk buys for those who needed large amounts of stationery over 2014.

"Go to places like Tesco or Aeon Big where they sell ball-point pens and 2B pencils in bulk -- buy bulk whenever possible, its cheaper. Or try places like Daiso where its RM5 flat for everything," said Wong.

She also encouraged recycling and conservative consumption among other cost-saving measures, such as by going paperless, using printers less and writing on both sides of a piece of paper.

"Switch to 'unbranded' stationery which works fine for everyday scribbling. If you must print something, reduce the 'thickness' of the ink by changing your print settings to 80% darkness. For students, always write on both sides of the paper. Use pencils wisely-- use down to the nib and don't sharpen until you absolutely need to," said Wong.

Bulk buys were also recommended by readers of The Star Online, such as Noni Jelani and Ken Robert, who commented on a question posted to the paper’s Facebook page.

"Buy items during sales, usually hypermarkets like Mydin, Tesco and Giant have good prices during the sales, and buy in packs," said Robert who also advised readers to use refillable fountain pens, refrain from buying crayons or watercolour paints.

Another reader, Pranee Kong suggested readers could use cost-saving measures such as by using both sides of sheets of A4 paper, cutting A4 paper into smaller pieces to make note papers for memos, and using pen caps to hold short pencils to use them until they were too short to be used.