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Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng speaks to the media after the 2020 Budget Consultation Council meeting at the Finance Ministry in Putrajaya June 27, 2019. — Picture by Choo Choy May

PUTRAJAYA, June 27 -Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng defended today a pair of red-and-black Chinese calligraphy couplets in his office, telling critics these were standard festive greetings.

He said the couplets photographed on a wall in his office were put up during Chinese New Year earlier this year.

“Who is bringing up this issue on Twitter? Why are they speaking about this but ignore the Quranic verses on another wall in my office?” Lim told reporters following the 2020 Budget Consultation Session at the ministry’s complex.

He also urged the media and the public to ignore what he described as a vexatious complaint and to not fall for racist and extremist baiting allegedly from Opposition supporters.

“Those who want to play on such sentiments are wasting time. Better to focus on the economy and developing the rakyat.

“Remember that a room has four walls, so do not only look at one. Do not get involved with those who have either lost their minds or had none at all,” Lim said.

Criticism arose on social media after the couplets were seen in pictures posted on the ministry’s official Facebook page of Lim with visitors from Microsoft Corporation’s Asia Pacific division at his office.

Behind them were two couplets, with the left reading “May the fate of the nation prosper and welcome a golden era” and the other saying “May everyone in the family get along well and a hundred businesses boom” written in

Chinese characters. Critics claimed the couplets were disrespectful of Bahasa Melayu's position as the national language, with some accusing Lim of "forgetting your place".

Comments on the post have since been disabled and largely hidden from public view.