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FCC appeals to Nirmala Sitharaman to restore media access to Finance Ministry

NEW DELHI, July 2019: The Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia (FCC) is distressed by media reports that Finance Minister Ms Nirmala Sitharaman has ordered that journalists accredited by the Press Information Bureau (PIB), a wing of the Government's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, should not be allowed access to the Finance Ministry in North Block without prior appointment.

The PIB grants accreditation to journalists only after a thorough investigation. The Finance Ministry is an important source of information for journalists. Denying access to PIB-accredited media personnel will adversely affect their professional work: news-gathering.

As it is, India ranks a lowly 140 in Press Freedom Rankings for 2019 in a list of 180 countries prepared by Reporters Without Borders. India, the world's largest democracy, also boasts of being home to over a lakh of publications and nearly a thousand television channels---more than any other country.

Unfortunately, access to primary sources of information has become rare, if not non-existent, in recent years. Regular Press Conferences by Prime Ministers and Senior Cabinet Ministers used to be a regular feature until five years ago. The present Government has simply dispensed with these healthy practices without a valid explanation.

Policy decisions and major news developments are being announced through Twitter. There is little direct interaction between decision-makers and the media. This does not bode well for the future of democracy in India.

The FCC appeals to the Finance Minister to reconsider her decision, and allow media access to her Ministry with mutually-agreed conditionalities, if necessary.

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