

# GMA: Free media makes governance challenging

President Arroyo admitted yesterday that a free press can make governance "challenging," but

vowed to pursue vital programs even if they are unpopular.

In her speech at the 37th anniver-

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sary celebration of Quirino province held in the capital of Cabanatuan, Mrs. Arroyo pointed out that her father, the late President Diosdado Macapagal, experienced the same difficulties during his term.

"I know for a fact from being around my father, who incidentally was a protégé of President (Elpidio) Quirino after whom your province was named, how challenging it is to govern our nation, especially with a media that is the freest in the whole world as it was during my father's presidency," Mrs. Arroyo said. "But a president governs for the benefit of all Filipinos and should not be focused on public relations."

Mrs. Arroyo, who has remained unpopular since

assuming office in 2001, has battled several attempts to oust her from office, ranging from impeachment to attempted coups by disgruntled military and police elements and opposition groups.

Her critics continue to allege that she plans to extend her stay in power, but the President maintained she would step down when her term ends in 2010.

Her administration has also been criticized here and abroad for failing to stem the killings of journalists, but officials said the government is sparing no effort to end the violence against the media.

According to the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, 56 journalists have been killed since 1986, 66 of whom were killed since 2001. This year, five media practitioners were killed.

"We have been working tirelessly to address challenges arising from the slowdown in the global economy combined with high oil

and food prices," she said. "We have succeeded in ensuring that our country's food supply remains stable."

She said rising prices of oil are beyond the control of the government. "We have introduced measures to lift the burden of our people. Several months ago we have removed the tariff on oil. We have also been providing targeted cash payments to the poorest of the poor to help you cope with your electric bills."

Press Secretary Jesus Durazo, on the other hand, explained that Mrs. Arroyo was actually seeking the help of the media in the effective implementation of pro-poor programs.

"We are fully aware of the influence of the media in shaping public opinion and determining the outcome of some events, but to the President, she would not be affected by comments if they would impede her goal of uplifting the economy and the poor," he said.