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Rappler

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IF I were advising Malacañang on how to deal with media I would tell them to lay off Rappler.

Dealing with the free press has always been a headache for governments all over the world. It's always been an adversarial relationship. Government sees media as a nuisance, an annoyance that it can do without.

But media's role in public affairs is guaranteed by the Constitution. Media exist with the blessing and protection of the fundamental law of the land.

Media are like pesky mosquitoes that constantly buzz around, to people's annoyance. Media are like a sniffer canine in search of scandal or wrongdoing. Media exist to unearth possible illegal activity in both public and private sectors.

In their zeal to expose wrongdoing, media often turn off government as the latter sees that as interference. What the media see as their duty as specified in the Constitution, government sees as vexing scrutiny that hinders its work.

Because of this, conflict between the two camps is constantly there, simmering quietly until it comes to a boil. Government, in retaliation, makes things hard for media to do their work.

But if I were advising government,

I would tell them to let media be. It's bad PR. Government has work to do and media, too, have work to do. They should co-exist peacefully, wary of each other but giving space to each other.

Because those who govern are fallible just like all human beings, they cannot be right or perfect all the time. Thus the need for watchdogs besides the legislature and judiciary.

If I were advising government, I would tell them media are not the enemy. Media may be cynical and constantly sniffing around for wrongdoing, but they cannot on their own destabilize or even topple government. Media don't have the power to do that. All they can do is report wrongdoing when it occurs. But if government doesn't abuse its power or cause anxiety and hardship among the people then what is there to worry about?

It's only when government becomes paranoid that it sees enemies where they don't exist. US President Richard Nixon's downfall in 1972 came about partly because he kept an enemies list and went after his perceived enemies, including rivals in the Democratic Party. Nixon's operatives overdid things and broke the law.

Government would do well to treat media as a necessary, if oftentimes vexing, part of democracy and concentrate on good governance. Otherwise, it will

end up in a Goliath and David situation, the government being the bad guy Goliath.

Media will continue to exist no matter what, and it's best to treat it not as an adversary but as an ally. By that I don't mean to be chummy-chummy with media but simply to exercise laissez-faire when it comes to dealing with the press.

By repressing media, government looks like a bully who can't take criticism and retaliates with all its might. It's like using a bazooka to kill a fly. But if it allows media their Constitutionally guaranteed space, it would earn plaudits for its tolerance.

So, let media do their work without any threats to their existence. Don't lose any sleep over their constant scrutiny. Treat them with unaccustomed nonchalance and insouciance. The results will be pleasantly surprising.

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* MEDIA