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Protesters decry loss of Venezuela TV

Staff and agencies
21 May, 2007

By CHRISTOPHER TOOTHAKER, Associated Press
Writer 7 minutes ago

10 CARACAS, Venezuela - Thousands of protesters carried a blocks-long "SOS" banner through Venezuela's capital on Monday, condemning threats to freedom of expression days before the country is set to lose one of its few remaining opposition-aligned TV stations.

"Threats to freedom of expression affect all citizens equally; it doesn't matter if you are pro-government or against the government," said Rafael Fuenmayor, a reporter from the Globovision 24-hour news channel, who helped organize the protest along with other local journalists.

RCTV is due to go off the air Monday, after Sunday's final day of programming, when the government says its license expires.

Protesters ended their march outside the mission of the Organization of American States, where they urged the body to take a closer look at the state of press freedoms under Chavez.

Founded in 1953, RCTV is Venezuela's oldest private network and broadcasts a mix of talk shows, soap operas and a version of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" RCTV frequently airs complaints of corruption, crime and

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inefficiency from both opposition and government supporters, whose grievances are rarely broadcast on state-run TV channels.

Venezuela's Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed the first of a series of legal challenges by RCTV, but more are pending.

"We have reason to believe the upcoming decisions from the Supreme Court of Justice will fall in line with law and justice," Lara said.

Venezuela still has a broad mix of newspapers, including many that are critical of the government.

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