

Venezuelans protest TV station closure

by UPI

CARACAS, Venezuela - Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez' decision to shut down an opposition TV station and replace it with a state-backed network triggered angry protests Monday.

The Venezuelan Social Television started broadcasting shortly after midnight, taking over the frequency previously occupied by Radio Caracas Television, Voice of America reported. Government officials previously had refused RCTV a new operating license and ordered it to turn over control of its transmitting equipment.

The state-run broadcast included traditional songs and dances, cartoons, documentaries and a statement from station President Lil Rodriguez -- who said that as a self-respecting nation, Venezuela now has a new source of messages of dignity, VOA reported.

But RCTV employees and university students protested in Caracas Monday, calling the station closure an attack on free speech. Bank worker Marycel Montiel said she joined a protest to denounce Chavez' authoritarian policies, comparing them to measures taken in Cuba.

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