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Embassy Row

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Venezuela backlash

A mild rebuke from **House Speaker Nancy Pelosi** prompted the Venezuelan ambassador to issue a strong defense of his government's decision to shut down a major independent television station and to claim the action had no impact on press freedom.

Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez wrote in a two-page letter to Mrs. Pelosi, California Democrat, that the decision not to renew the broadcast license of RCTV, the oldest television station in the nation, was a "simple regulatory matter" that was entirely legal under Venezuelan law. Besides, he added, RCTV was a dangerous opponent of **President Hugo Chavez** and supported a coup that briefly overthrew him in 2002.

Mr. Alvarez insisted the decision to close RCTV had nothing to do with its "critical editorial stance against the government." However, he added, RCTV was subversive.

"It used its privileged position as a media outlet to help subvert Venezuela's constitutional order," Mr. Alvarez wrote.

The authoritarian and anti-American president on Friday lashed out at critics from Washington to Europe and neighboring Brazil, which all denounced the closure of the television station. Thousands of Venezuelan protesters also demonstrated against the action.

Mrs. Pelosi last week said Mr. Chavez's decision to close RCTV "is exactly the kind of action that raises concern about his leadership." She urged Mr. Chavez to "reconsider this ill-advised decision."

The Committee to Protect Journalists issued a stronger statement, calling the silencing of RCTV an "arbitrary decision" and a "setback for democracy" in Venezuela.

Diplomatic traffic

Foreign visitors in Washington this week include:

Today

•A delegation from Venezuela with: **Omar Arenas**, legal adviser to the Chacao Municipality Parochial Board; **Emilio Grateron**, a member of the Chacao Municipality Council; **Villapol de Jesus Morales**, president of the San Francisco Municipality Council; **Delsa Solorzano**, coordinator for the Commission of Human Rights; **Dayaneth Scorza**, a staff member of the Science, Technology and Media Committee of the National Assembly; **Eduardo Enrique Vale**, secretary-general of the Social Christian Party; and **Victor Manuel Velasco**, legal adviser to the Zulia Federation of Workers. They meet with congressional and administration officials as part of a 12-day U.S. visit organized by the American Council of Young Political Leaders.

•Danny Seidemann, an Israeli lawyer and counsel to Ir Amim, an organization dedicated to the future of Jerusalem. He addresses a forum on the 40th anniversary of the Six-Day War, organized by Americans for Peace Now, the American Task Force on Palestine and the Foundation for Middle East Peace.

•Subodh Kant Sahai, India's minister for food processing industries, who holds an 11:45 a.m. press conference at the Indian Embassy, 2107 Massachusetts Ave. NW.

Wednesday

•Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz of Israel, who meets with **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice**. Mr. Mofaz, a former defense minister, meets with **R. Nicholas Burns**, undersecretary of state for political affairs, on Thursday.

Thursday

•Education Minister Annette Schavan of Germany, who discusses the high-tech Euro Program for Research and Development at 7 p.m. at the National Press Club.

•Usman Majid, a member of Legislative Assembly and former minister of state planning and development of the state government of Jammu and Kashmir. He speaks at the United States Institute of Peace on the future of the Kashmiri people and the Indian-Pakistan peace process.

•Asif Alam, president of the Association of Pakistani Professionals, who participates in a panel discussion on the Pakistani elections in a forum at Johns Hopkins University's Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.

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