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Closing down Venezuela's last remaining opposition television station would be "the beginning of the end" of President Hugo **Chavez's** rule, the channel's head said in comments published here Monday.

"It would be the beginning of the end because it would close the escape valve available to Venezuelans. Globovision is the only media where the opposition can take a stand," station director Alberto Ravell told conservative daily Spanish newspaper ABC.

Ravell said the broadcaster was the only station in Venezuela whose "editorial line is not set by the government."

Last month Chavez refused to renew the broadcast licence of Radio Caracas Television (RCTV), which expired on May 27, on grounds the network was conspiring to overthrow him.

Venezuela's Communications Minister Willian Lara has since accused Globovision of inciting attempts to assassinate Chavez, citing as proof its airing of footage of the 1981 assassination attempt on former pope John Paul II accompanied by a salsa song whose lyrics included the line "have faith."

Chavez's move against RCTV, a popular broadcaster of soap operas and variety shows, sparked days of clashes between police and protesters that left dozens injured and led to an international outcry.

The Venezuelan president has said Globovision distorted reaction to the closure of RCTV.

While Venezuelan state television has depicted the protesters as vandals Globovision has depicted the marches against the closure of RCTV as a battle for free speech and has blamed the police for the violence.

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