

Al-Jazeera acquires Gore-founded Current TV group

SAN FRANCISCO, US: Al-Jazeera has acquired Current TV, a struggling cable channel that will give the Qatar-based broadcaster the access to millions of US homes it has long sought, it was confirmed on Wednesday.



Terms of the deal for Current, which was founded by US former vice president Al Gore, were not immediately disclosed, but Forbes reported that a possible value of US\$400m could net the former politician a tidy US\$100m.

The acquisition should also give Al-Jazeera vastly broader visibility in US homes because although Current has been struggling of late it nonetheless is available in 60 million American households, according to its own figures.

"We are proud and pleased that Al-Jazeera, the award-winning international news organization, has bought Current TV," said Gore, the San Francisco-based channel's chairman, and Joel Hyatt, co-founder and CEO, in a statement.

Gore also said Current had proudly offered "thought-provoking commentary" and Emmy and Peabody award-winning programming "to give voice to those who are not typically heard" and "to speak truth to power."

The New York Times reported that Al-Jazeera was expected to create a new channel, "Al-Jazeera America," instead of using its existing English-language vehicle Al-Jazeera English, to capitalise on Current's audience reach.

Hyatt told staff in an email that "Al-Jazeera is planning to invest significantly in building 'Al-Jazeera America,' a network focused on international news for the American audience," *The Times* report said.

"Al (Gore) and I will both serve on the advisory board of Al-Jazeera America, and we look forward to helping build an important news network," he added, according to the report.

The plan could put the broadcaster financed by the Qatari government into closer competition with CNN and other US news channels, as Al-Jazeera is offered only by a handful of American cable and satellite distributors.

Current Media, founded in 2005, operates Current TV, and reaches households in Britain and the United States. It also operates a youth-focused website Current.com, where users can submit their own content.

The channel has won two Emmy Awards and other honours. It reaches 71 million households worldwide.

However, *The Times* said a sale was considered because of low ratings, with an average of just 42,000 people watching the channel last year.

Source: *AFP* via I-net Bridge

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