



"How dare Senator Daschle criticise President Bush while we are fighting our war on terrorism," was the fiery volley of a Republican minority leader, Senator Trent Lott, all bucked up to counter criticism. It was right after the adoption of new legislations and policies following the September 11 calamity, when few men like Daschle had the courage to speak out in protest, and risk being branded the enemy within.

War certainly is a bad time for free speech. As political and social pressures mount, the leaders find it convenient to readily dismiss any flack that their polices gather, and sweep their own home truths under the thick rug of patriotism.

As for the US government, after 9/11, it was, and still is, bent over and determined to go on its chosen course by resisting opposition, combating criticism with a vengeance. But what about the free media that upholds the great democratic principle: the right to free expression? Unfortunately, this often gets the axe in the land of the free -- America.

Does any government have the leverage in monitoring a vast network of

The Land of the Not So Free

MUSTAFA ZAMAN

media, which is privately owned and continuously professes to enjoy 'total freedom'? The word freedom is something of a euphemism for democracy. It is a phrase that lends the countries around the world an essential *mashalla* (spice) -- an ingredient they incessantly crow about and which at present is being considerably tampered with.

Gore Vidal, the writer who often rubbed shoulders with the high-ups, wrote a piece after the twin tower catastrophe and it had to cross the Atlantic and travel to Italy to see the light of day.

Gore's article was originally commissioned by *The Daily Mail*. The paper declared the piece unsuitable for publication. Then *Vanity Fair* rushed to the rescue, or it seemed so. *Vanity Fair* asked Vidal to update and elaborate. After a three-month delay, that magazine also dropped it. An irked Vidal then offered it to several UK newspapers, who turned it down. Finally, it appeared in Italy in a collection of Vidal's essays entitled "La fine della libertà: Verso un nuovo totalitarismo?"

"The End of Liberty", the Vidal piece, shatters many myths that America makes effort to keep alive. After jump-starting with the creation story depicted in the holy Quran, where he discovers that Allah created darkness on the same day (he calls it Black Tuesday) Manhattan towers were struck. Then it goes on to explore a lot of facts that brings out the true colours of the Oval-Office Kings.

Vidal traces Osama bin Laden's past involvement with the CIA. A nation that Edward Syed referred to as "pragmatic" in their everyday affairs is known for their disdain for history. Vidal takes a different route, he retraces the past courses and sheds light on the underhanded acts initiated by the people occupying the highest office. Vidal writes, "Let us deal first with the six-foot seven-inch Osama who enters history in 1979 as a guerilla warrior working alongside the CIA to defend Afghanistan against the invading Soviets." Vidal also digs out the Saudi connection of the White House and