

A college that leads *Lahore*

By Ahsan Raza

WE are living in a world dominated by the Formanites or alumni of the Forman Christian College (FCC). A look at the list given in the prospectus of the college confirms that it is President Pervez Musharraf's college in more than one way.

The president went to the FCC as did his closest ally in the bureaucracy, Tariq Aziz. General Sahib's closest friends among politicians Farooq Ahmed Leghari, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi and Senate Chairman Muhammadmian Soomro are all Formanites. So is Barrister Wasim Sajjad, Senator and a senior lawyer in the panel which has been pursuing the presidential reference against Chief Justice

Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry from the government's side.

These gentlemen, like others who have been to the FCC, have the golden college motto to work by: 'By love serve one another'. The college aims at 'preparing students for ethical and responsible leadership in Pakistan and the wider world' and has played a teacher to luminaries such as Jamsheed Marker, Inder Kumar Gujral, Abdus Sattar, Cecil Chaudhry, Iftikhar Ahmed Sarohi, Justice Nasim Hasan Shah, Yahya Bakhtiar, Professor Stanley K Madan, Allama Mashriqi and last but certainly not the least the very adorable and respectable professors Ghulam Mustafa Tabassum and Eqbal Ahmed.

The college is today heavily guarded, like a

cantonment. Discipline reigns supreme here and comments, even simple ones about its history and existing trends on the campus, are not easily solicited.

Humaira Iqtidar wrote in Zmag.Org (2003): "The paths around the college have barricades thrown across that make it impossible for more than two people to walk abreast." These barricades are yet to be removed. The routine is however broken by a woman bicycle rider, perhaps a foreign faculty member.

The campus is impressive boast it does of six faculties. There are six blocks and two more are being planned. The college has six hostels to house hundreds of students. Of them Ewing Hall is located in Anarkali. The hostels located on the campus are: Griswold Hall, Kennedy Hall, Newton Hall, Velte Hall and West Hall.

Besides, the FCC has basketball courts, a gymnasium, badminton and table tennis facilities and a large sports ground which is something of a rarity at educational institutions these days. Add to it a swimming pool

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and six lawn tennis courts and you will have a fair idea what the college can offer on the side of the studies.

The FCC's tradition is glorious and truly inspiring.

In 1864, Charles William Forman, a missionary from the US, founded the Rang Mahal School in Lahore, the first English-speaking school in north India. According to the 1964 issue of Folio, the FCC magazine, college classes were added to it in 1865 and from this emerged Forman Christian College. The affairs of the FCC were administered by the United Presbyterian Church of the USA.

Dr James C.R. Ewing (later Sir James) served as principal of the college for



The FC College building. — Dawn

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30 years, retiring in 1917. It was during his time that, in 1902, the college became the first institution of higher education in the Punjab province to admit women.

The college spent its initial days in downtown Lahore, near Anarkali. It moved to its present location in 1940 without celebrating a formal opening. Ram Singh designed the campus using an Indo-Saracenic style of architecture which is a mixture of Indian traditional and Mughal style of architecture. In 1943, the Ewing Memorial Library was opened. On a visit to the college, the then provincial governor said he found "nothing alarmingly austere in the new FCC buildings; they are certainly business like, but they are still attractive."

In 1947, the college lent a healing hand to the refugees. Two of its hostels were converted into a hospital where the wounded refugees coming from East Punjab were treated. The college retained its reputation as an institution of great merit through the 1950s and 1960s, attracting among others a youngster by the name of Pervez Musharraf.

In his autobiography 'In the Line of Fire' General Musharraf says it was here that he learnt to make a time bomb and here that he had his first brush with death "thanks to a mango tree". "It was laden with fruit. My friends told me to use my skill as a gymnast and climb the tree to pluck some mangoes. I shimmyed up. Hanging high up from a branch, I would swing upward and pluck the fruit with my feet. Things went fine and I had plucked quite a few mangoes when on a high swing the branch in my hands broke. I came crashing down, hit the ground very hard, and passed

out. My friends thought that I was dead. I opened my eyes quite some time later in Mr Dutta's house, under a doctor's care."

Former finance minister Makhdoom Shahabuddin was a contemporary of General Musharraf at FCC. "The life on campus offered a lot to us," the Makhdoom from Rahim Yar Khan recalls. "At the hostel we used to sing 'Halaat bada naheen saktay' in chorus and would somehow draw energy from the line."

He remembers Professor Shape coming to teach English to the intermediate class. The professor opened the first chapter of the book, went through it, closed the book and said: "Since I don't agree with the contents of the book, I will not teach you any more." And he left the class never to return.

In 1972, the college was nationalised, as were other private colleges, by the avowedly socialist government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

The nationalised FCC could not retain its glorious record. Violence, ugly student union politics and unchallenged rule of a fundamentalist student party, an offshoot of a religious party, held the college hostage for long.

In 1997, after a prolonged legal struggle, the Supreme Court of Pakistan ruled that the seizure was illegal. In 2003, the control of the FCC was transferred to the Presbyterian Church, USA. Dr Peter Armacost, President Emeritus of Eckerd College in Florida, assumed the office of principal of FCC on March 20, 2003. In September of 2004, Punjab granted full university status to the FCC.

"The prefix of 'Government' for the FCC was an eyesore," says Makhdoom Shahab and wishes the college an early and complete recovery.