

Meet the Indian-origin doctor who won Abu Dhabi Award

Doctor's 50-decade experience with Emiratis taught him to place priority on values

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Abu Dhabi: "The UAE was not built on money but a vision [of Shaikh Zayed] and noble values! We came here to build this country based on that vision and values."

Dr George Mathew, a UAE citizen of Indian origin who received the Abu Dhabi Award on Monday, summarised his experience of half-a-century in the UAE in two sentences as each encounter with his patients reminds him this fact.

"Your true self comes out when you are in pain. My conviction about the UAE and its people has come from my experience with reactions of Emirati patients when they and their loved ones are in pain," he told *Gulf News* while narrating his experience since he reached Al Ain on May 30, 1967.

He said Emiratis are not at all aggressive when they deal with an adverse situation. "They have a balanced mind and they accept the reality."

Dr Mathew said this capability reflects a society's values. "Because this country was built by a great man's [Shaikh Zayed] vision and noble values of this society," said the doctor, who had the privilege to offer medical treatment to the late leader.

When he met Shaikh Zayed for the first time, he realised the great leader's charisma. "If you sit with him for a minute, you will be mesmerised. Shaikh Zayed believed that money was for his people's progress ... it has to be utilised for people's welfare. We [professionals] came here as part of implementing that vision, to build this country," Dr Mathew explained.

That's why, he believes, the UAE achieved unimaginable progress in a short span of time. "I never imagined [in late sixties] this country would achieve so much."

"In which other country would you be able to see 99.99 per cent of its people are happy. That is because this country and its people give priority to values ... not to money."

"If you built a nation on money, you would lose values. The UAE is not like that. That's why human values are upheld here," said the doctor who received UAE citizenship in 2004.

His wife Valsa Mathew, a homemaker, and daughter Merriam Mathew, who works with the government, are also UAE citizens and they are also very happy about the life in Al Ain. "We did not want to go anywhere else. Because we will not be happy anywhere else," he said.

He said his more than 50 years' in the country was a testimony to the UAE society's happiness and comfort. "I was very young [25-or 26-year-old] when I reached here. Who will stay in a country for 50 years if you are not happy and comfortable there?"

Dr Mathew has never had any bitter experience in his life here. "I am good for them because they are good. I became good because they are good!"

Hailing from southern Indian state of Kerala, Dr Mathew did his MBBS from Thiruvananthapuram Medical College, went to Kuwait in 1966, working there for a few months. Then he moved to Bahrain where he came to know about a "beautiful place called Al Ain" from missionaries who had worked there.

After joining the Abu Dhabi Government, he was sent to the UK twice for obtaining diplomas in tropical medicine and dermatology. In 1971, he became the medical director of Al Ain district and oversaw the progress of the medical sector.