

Society

Previously low profile, Dr. Isaac Mathai has recently been in the news for two reasons. One, he played host to Sarah Fergusson on her rushed visit to Bangalore last month. Two, and more importantly, he is also establishing a \$ 115.5 million International Holistic Healing Centre in Whitefield on the outskirts of Bangalore. "It will be a combination of a spa and a medical centre with technical expertise from Health Fitness Dynamic Inc. which specialises in setting up spas all over the world," announces the doctor.

The Spa expects to house 20 resident doctors and 2,400 foreign patients who will be offered four star facilities. Only 40 per cent of India's privileged elite will join them. British restaurateur and multimillionaire Nigel Fenner Fownes, along with a real estate tycoon from New York are amongst Mathai's backers.

Mathai's childhood was inconspicuous. He grew up in God's own country, in the picturesque hills of Kerala. "My mother was a well-known homeopathy doctor. Very often, difficult cases that were almost dismissed as fatal by allopathic doctors were brought to her. By the age of twelve I could assist my mother by putting different medicines in different sachets." And before he realised it, childhood enchantment turned into a concrete career option. The Homeopathic Medical College at Kottayam became his alma mater.

He had literally imbibed the secrets of homeopathy at his mother's knee, and that stood him in good stead. "I



That's Fergie, with Dr. Isaac Mathai and wife Suja

Fergie Says So!

Move over Deepak Chopra! Holistic practitioner, Dr. Isaac Mathai is the international celebrity's latest hope

already knew what tablets to dispense. And because of this skill, I was always one up on my colleagues." In his final year at college, he was sent to Colombo as part of a student member delegation to attend the Alternate Medical Conference where he presented a paper on 'How to incorporate yoga therapy in medicine.' "The conference opened my mind to the possibility of studying different alternate systems and that homeopathy alone was not the answer." He came back a changed man. Soon afterwards he moved to the prestigious Hahnemann Post Graduate Institute in London to pursue his MD.

Society



■ The Dalai Lama being received by Dr Mathai's father

Mathai's in-depth knowledge impressed the college authorities. As part of his training programme, he was attached to the 101 Clinic where he worked as an assistant for a year before he was promoted to the rank of a physician. His popularity grew by leaps and bounds even though initially, his strong Malayali accent proved to be a handicap. "In the beginning my accent was terrible, I could not speak English fluently. Once an English patient who couldn't understand me asked for another doctor. But interestingly enough, after six months the same lady came back to me for consultation and has been my patient since then," he charmingly narrates.

After a successful one-year tenure, he was offered consultancy services with the same clinic. He gladly accepted the offer and was soon travelling extensively, tending to patients. As part of his private practice he simultaneously attached himself to the Good Health Clinic in London and the Waverly Clinic in New York.

The small-town Kottayam boy had indeed come a long way. He was now hobnobbing with the bold and the beautiful. The rich and famous in Hollywood sought his expertise in the field of holistic medicine. He offered them a combination of emotional counselling, energy healing and medicine at a consultation fee of \$ 300 per hour plus extra costs for E-mail and fax consultations. His friends now included the likes of Tina Turner, Sting, George Harrison, Ravi Shankar, the Duchess of York, the Warner Brothers, the Paris-based Kloogy and Hermes clan. The list is endless but professional

ethics restrict him from mentioning all the names; "these are people who have publicly announced me as their consultant and that's why I can talk about them."

And they all loved him for one reason. He treated them normally. No unnecessary fawning or fussing. Mathai remembers his first encounter with Sting; "When Sting first came to see me, I didn't know who he was. His throat was not in good shape. I told him that he would have to rest for three days. He replied that it would not be possible. I was a little annoyed and told him to do whatever he wanted. He then explained that it was not possible only because he was a singer and he had an audience of 50,000 waiting for him. I was losing patience but still managed to convey to him that his body was not going to change according to his programme and it had to be vice versa. He went away laughing. About two days later, I saw him on television and only then realised who he was. So the next time, he came to my clinic I apologised to him. He spontaneously confessed, 'That's what I like about you, I want people to treat me normally'."

When Tina Turner walked into his clinic, his staffers went into a frenzy. True to form he couldn't understand what the fuss was all about — he didn't know Tina from



■ The clinic in London

Eve! He taught her breathing exercises and the nose-washing technique. "She's a wonderful person. When she comes to the clinic she is so simply attired that no one can even recognise her. When she comes for treatment, she spends nearly a day at the clinic and we have long

WIN A TRIP
TO LONDON!

MARCH 1997
A MAGNA
PUBLICATION Rs. 30

Society

chats in between consultations. Tina is a strong believer in Buddhism and has an affinity towards Indian philosophy and our way of life. She is very keen on visiting India but somehow the plans haven't materialised."

Former Beatles star George Harrison is another personal friend. "He is deep-rooted, solid and spiritual. He has been to India several times and loves the country. I have had very interesting conversations with him," he says.

Dr. Isaac Mathai shares a relationship with his celebrity patients that extends far beyond the perfunctory doctor-patient codes of conduct. His patients have a very intimate one-to-one rapport with him. "They confide in me about relationship problems, business problems, marital problems. And I am able to give them a balanced and objective overview of the situation. They are comfortable with me because I treat them normally. If I start behaving like a star-struck fan, they will lose respect for me."

This 36-year-old holistic healer now has patients in 30 countries around the world, in places as exotic as Antigua and Turkey. But Isaac Mathai is a simple Indian at heart, and soon he felt the call of his motherland. Seven years had passed. He toyed with the idea of setting up an International Holistic Centre in India. "In '89 we organised an International Holistic Conference at Hotel Ashok in Bangalore. The Dalai Lama was the Chief Patron and it was attended by 500 hundred delegates from all over the world. It was a very successful conference."

And so he made up his mind to head towards India. His associates at the Good Health Clinic reluctantly let him go but not before extracting a promise. He had to shuttle between India and the West. Initially he spent two months here and the rest of the time abroad, but over time his priorities had changed.

Mathai was now a family man. Six years earlier he had gone in for an arranged marriage with a Madras-based nutritionist, Suja and was now the father of Anna (5), Mathew (2) and John (seven months). And like the average Indian he wanted his kids to be brought in the country of his birth. "The Duchess of York expressed surprise when she heard about this. She just couldn't believe that I could be happily married to a woman I barely knew. And I remember telling her that in the West, they fall in love, marry and the love dies, but in India we marry, fall in love and the love grows. She couldn't help but agree with me," he recalls.

This then is the man who invited the Duchess of York to Bangalore for a private visit-cum-healing session. His close proximity to the Duchess is very evident, he even



■ The Mathai family

refers to her by name. "Sarah had never been to India and so I invited her to visit. She is a wonderful person and very down-to-earth, she wants everybody to treat her normally. She fell for our country and found Bangalore very beautiful despite the pollution. She loves jasmine flowers and kababs! In fact she is very fond of Indian food and enjoyed eating here. She was thrilled to see Queen Victoria's statue because the former happens to be her favourite person. She has agreed to be a spokesperson for the International Holistic Healing Centre and that's another reason why she was down here. She expressed her desire to meet an Indian spiritual leader and I took her to Puthupati to meet Sri Sathya Sai Baba who blessed her with the gift of a cross and a chain. Sarah was very moved. She plans to come back to India soon."

The Duchess of York may have come and gone, but Mathai is no seven day wonder. His fax machine rings. Incessantly. His intercom buzzes at repeated intervals. Interested investors and patients alike hound him with E-mail. But the doctor remains unperturbed. For him it is just another day in paradise.

— NAYARE ALI