

Committee awards Nobel Prizes for fields of chemistry, physics



NOBEL
Physics • 1999

Winners since 1989

- Gerardus 't Hooft and Martinus J.G. Veltman, Holland
- Robert C. Laughlin, U.S.; Horst L. Störmer, Germany and Daniel C. Tsui, China
- Steven Chu, William Phillips, U.S. and Claude Cohen-Tannoudji, France
- David M. Lee, Douglas D. Osheroff and Robert C. Richardson, U.S.
- Martin L. Perl and Frederick Reines, U.S.
- Clifford G. Shull, U.S.; Brian N. Brockhouse, Canada
- Russell A. Hulse and Joseph H. Taylor Jr., U.S.
- Georges Charpak, France
- Pierres-Gilles de Gennes, France
- Jerome I. Friedman, Henry W. Kendall, U.S. and Richard E. Taylor, Canada
- Norman Ramsey, Hans Dehmelt, U.S. and Wolfgang Paul, Germany

AP — Scientists in the United States and Denmark were awarded Nobel Prizes yesterday for their efforts to corral some of the fastest, smallest phenomena in the universe and peer into their very cores.

None of the winners of the physics and chemistry prizes this year are household names. But the face of the chemistry winner, Ahmed Zewail of the California Institute of Technology, is familiar in his native Egypt, where he appears on two postage stamps.

Zewail, 53, was honored for pioneering a revolution in chemistry by using rapid-fire laser flashes that illuminate the motion of atoms in a molecule.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said Zewail's work in the 1980s led to the birth of femtochemistry, the use of high-speed cameras to monitor chemical reactions at a scale of femtoseconds, 0.0000000000001 seconds (one-quadrillionth of a second).

"We have reached the end of the road; no chemical reactions take place faster than this," the academy said. "We can now see the movements of individual atoms as we imagine them. They are no longer invisible."

Other scientists described Zewail's studies of how chemical bonds break and new molecules form as "the ultimate level of observation." They said because his work helps researchers manipulate chemical reactions on a fundamental level, it might lead to faster computer chips and ultra-precise machinery.

"Everything in life is getting faster and faster," Henry Kaptyn, a laser expert at the University of Colorado in Boulder, said. "This lays the groundwork for technology that will develop over the next 20 to 50 years."

"The main thing you have to do to get the Nobel Prize is not die."

— Martinus J.G. Veltman
Co-winner of 1999 Nobel Prize in physics

The Nobel committee surprised a sleeping Zewail with a pre-dawn telephone call to his home in San Marino, Calif., where he was recuperating from a cold.

Gerardus 't Hooft and Martinus J.G. Veltman won the physics prize for developing more precise calculations to predict and confirm the existence of subatomic particles.

It is the latest in a series of Nobel prizes for researchers who are inching closer to a unified theory of the forces that control the behavior of matter and the complexities of the universe.



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Winners since 1989

- 1999 Ahmed H. Zewail, United States
- 1998 Walter Kohn and John A. Pople, United States
- 1997 Paul D. Boyer, United States; John E. Walker, England; and Jens C. Skou, Denmark
- 1996 Harold W. Kroto, Britain and Robert F. Curl Jr. and Richard E. Smalley, United States
- 1995 Paul Crutzen, Netherlands and Mario Molina and F. Sherwood Rowland, United States
- 1994 George A. Olah, United States
- 1993 Kary B. Mullis, United States and Michael Smith, Canada
- 1992 Rudolph A. Marcus, Canadian-born American
- 1991 Richard R. Ernst, Switzerland
- 1990 Elias James Corey, United States
- 1989 Sidney Altman and Thomas Cech, United States

Officials criticized for floods

TEZIUTLAN, Mexico (AP) — With Mexico's presidential campaign overshadowed by disastrous flooding, President Ernesto Zedillo has warned candidates against trying to use the tragedy to win political points.

But the government's handling of the crisis has already provoked criticism, with political challengers attacking the establishment and governing politicians coming out at one another.

A long list of "should haves" surfaced. Dam flows should have been opened earlier; more people should have been warned earlier; deforestation should have been prevented; homes on dangerous hillsides should have been evacuated long ago.

Meanwhile, victims of last week's flooding and mudslides, which killed at least 350 people, are clamoring for food and water.

Zedillo's former interior minister, Francisco Labastida, considered the favorite in the 2000 presidential elections, was criticized on the front page of a major daily this week for putting his name on emergency-aid packages.

Supporters of former Puebla Gov. Manuel Bartlett, who also is seeking the ruling party's nomination, reported the Labastida packages were distributed to mudslide victims in Puebla state who showed their voter credentials.

Labastida's staff said yesterday that the packages had been handed out because they were immediately available and were distributed by the federal Family Development Fund, an agency headed by Zedillo's wife.

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