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WARS, ROWS AND SCANDALS: WHEN THE NOBELS DIDN'T GO AS PLANNED

Wars, jailed laureates and diplomatic rows have occasionally put the brakes on the Nobel prizes through the years. This time it is the coronavirus pandemic that has thwarted plans, and while prize announcements will go ahead this week, December festivities will be scaled back. The traditional December 10 awards ceremony and banquet in Stockholm honoring the laureates in medicine, physics, chemistry, literature and economics has been replaced by a televised event where the winners will receive their prizes in their home countries. The Oslo ceremony for the peace prize, held on the same day, will meanwhile go ahead on a smaller scale, and that banquet has also been cancelled. Here are some previous occasions when the Nobels didn't go as planned.

Prizes not awarded

The committees tasked with selecting Nobel laureates in the fields of medicine, physics, chemistry, literature, peace and economics can refrain from awarding the prize. The Nobel Foundation's statutes say this is possible when no work or research is deemed worthy. Not awarding the prize can also be an honour. In 1948, several months after the death of Mahatma Gandhi, the Nobel Peace Prize was not awarded, a homage to the Indian pacifist who never won the prize-widely considered a historic omission. The committee at the time said "there was no suitable living candidate".

In total, 49 prizes have not been awarded since the first Nobels in 1901, most of them in the field of peace (16 times). The prize can also be postponed.

That was the case in 2018, when a scandal engulfed the Swedish Academy which selects the literature prize winner. The 2018 prize was awarded instead the following year, to Polish author Olga Tokarczuk.

World wars

While Sweden remained neutral during the two world wars, the Nobel committees often refrained from awarding the prizes, especially during World War II. Both moral and logistical reasons were cited, as well as the fact that the committees in Stockholm no longer had access to scientific publications. Norway, which awards the peace prize, was meanwhile occupied by Nazi Germany from April 1940. The peace prize was not awarded between 1939 and 1945, when the 1944 prize was awarded retroactively to the Red Cross. In Stockholm, the prizes were awarded again from 1944, though the prize ceremony in December was cancelled.

Absent friends

In 1924, organizers cancelled the formal prize ceremonies in Stockholm and Oslo because of a combination of ailing laureates, including Polish writer Wladyslaw Reymont, and the fact that the chemistry and peace prizes were not awarded. That was the only time the ceremonies have been cancelled in peacetime. Meanwhile, the celebratory banquet traditionally held after the December 10 prize ceremony at Stockholm's City Hall was cancelled in 1956 to avoid inviting the Soviet ambassador because of the repression of the Hungarian Revolution. An unofficial,



The portrait of Alfred Nobel is seen prior to the announcement of the winners of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm yesterday. — AFP photos



A bust of Alfred Nobel is pictured prior to the announcement of the winners of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.

smaller dinner was organized instead. Several laureates have over the years been unable to attend the Nobel ceremony for political reasons. German journalist and pacifist Carl Von Ossietzky was detained in a Nazi concentration camp and was unable to receive his peace prize in 1936. He died two years later.

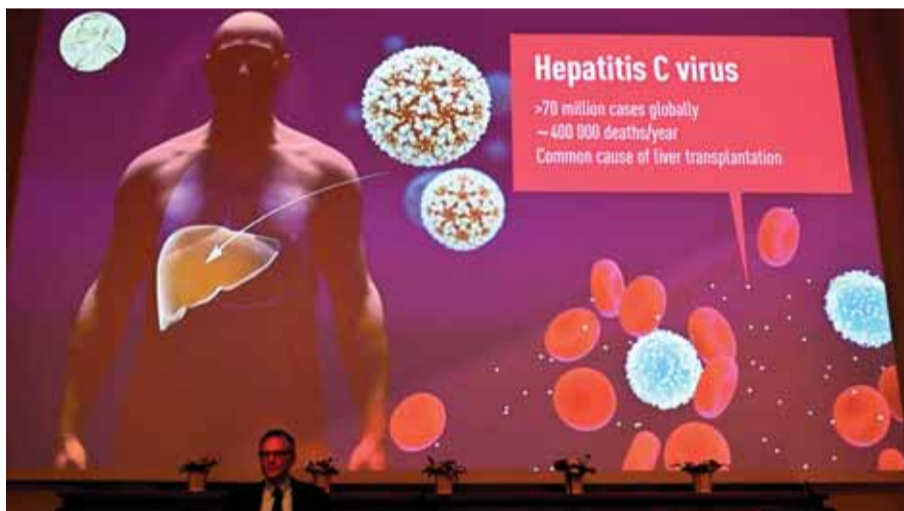
Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was under house arrest when she won the peace prize in 1991 and was unable to accept her prize in person until 2012. In 2010, Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo was in prison when he was awarded the peace prize. His chair remained empty, where the prize was placed. He died in 2017. In the case of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Soviet writer was forced to decline his 1970 literature

prize, fearing that he would not be able to return to his country should he travel to receive it. He finally accepted the award four years later.

Declined prizes

Several laureates have declined their prizes, including two who did so of their own will. French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre turned the literature prize down in 1964, and although Russian author Boris Pasternak accepted it in 1958, Soviet authorities later forced him to decline it. In 1973, Vietnam's peace negotiator Le Duc Tho refused to share the peace prize with US secretary of state Henry Kissinger, arguing that the ceasefire ending the Vietnam War was not being respected.

Kissinger meanwhile refused to travel to Oslo for the prize ceremony because of the risk of protests, and was replaced by the US ambassador. In the 1930s, three German scientists were awarded Nobels: Richard Kuhn (1938) and Adolf Butenandt (1939) in chemistry, and Gerhard Domagt (1939) in medicine. But Hitler-outraged over the prize to Von Ossietzky-banned any German from accepting a Nobel, and they were forced to decline their prizes. They received their Nobels after the war. — AFP



Nobel Committee member Patrik Ernfors sits in front of a screen displaying the work field of the winners of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine during a press conference at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm yesterday. Americans Harvey Alter and Charles Rice together with Briton Michael Houghton won the Nobel Medicine Prize yesterday for the discovery of the Hepatitis C virus, the Nobel jury said. — AFP

Five things to know about Nobel prizes

Since 1901, the Nobel prizes have been awarded to men, women and organizations whose work has led to great advances for mankind, in line with the wishes of inventor Alfred Nobel. Here are five things to know about the prizes and their creator.

Posthumous awards

Since 1974, the statutes of the Nobel Foundation stipulate that the award may not be given posthumously. But a person may be awarded the honor if she or he dies between the time of the announcement in October and the formal prize ceremony in December. Before the change, only two people had won a Nobel posthumously. One was Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swedish secretary general of the United Nations who died in a plane crash in 1961 but was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize later the same year. And in 1931, the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded posthumously to another Swede, Erik Axel Karlfeldt. In 2011, the medicine prize committee selected Ralph Steinman of Canada, unaware that he had passed away just three days before its announcement. The foundation decided nevertheless to give him the prize.

Unlikely peace prize nominations

From Adolf Hitler to Michael Jackson via Stalin or Mussolini, the Nobel Peace Prize has, in almost 120 years of existence, seen its share of improbable, far-fetched or eyebrow-raising candidates pass through. Hitler was nominated for the Peace Prize by a Swedish MP in January 1939, on the brink of the bloodiest conflict in history. The proposal, which was meant as sarcasm and aimed at discrediting the nomination of Britain's Neville Chamberlain after the Munich Agreements, was however withdrawn. Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, later tried for genocide, was also pro-

posed, as was Jules Rimet, the "father" of the football World Cup.

Only one in 20 female laureates

While their representation among winners has been steadily increasing since the early years, as of 2019 women still only represented five percent of all laureates. Between 1901 and 1920, only four women were honored, which has increased to 24 percent in the last two decades, but still only account for 54 out of the 923 laureates. The economics prize has only been awarded to two women, but it has only been around since 1969, which can be compared to the physics prize which has only three female laureates since 1901. Nevertheless, the first person to win the Nobel Prize twice was Marie Curie, in 1903 in physics and in 1911 in chemistry.

Nobel the poet

Nobel went down in history as the inventor of dynamite, but he was also keen on English poetry and a fan of Shelley and Byron. He wrote poetry his entire life, sometimes in his native Swedish but mostly in the Bard's language. In a letter to a friend, he wrote: "I have not the slightest pretension to call my verses poetry; I write now and then for no other purpose than to relieve depression, or to improve my English." In 1862, at the age of 29 and questioning his literary talent, he sent a letter to a young woman that said in French: "Physics is my field, not writing." The year of his death, 1896, he wrote a scandalous tragedy in four acts entitled "Nemesis", inspired by Shelley's play "The Cenci" about a woman in 16th-century Rome who murders her incestuous father.

Mathematics?

Why is there no Nobel prize for mathematics? There were longstanding rumors that Alfred Nobel's lover had an affair with mathematician Gosta Mittag-Leffler, but in the 1980s, researchers were able to put those to rest. There's nothing to support the rumor, and everything suggests otherwise. So why is there no prize? There are two likely explanations. In 1895, when Nobel wrote his will, a maths prize already existed in Sweden and he saw no need for a second one. And at the beginning of the 20th century, the applied sciences were in public and scientific favor. The contribution of mathematics to humanity was not as obvious as it is today. — AFP

In era of team science, are Nobels out of step?

With the 2020 Nobel prizes this week comes a recurrent question: has the world's most prestigious awards for physics, chemistry and medicine - first conferred in 1901 - lost touch with the way modern science is conducted? A century ago, landmark discoveries took place mostly in the mind or laboratory of a single individual. More recently, big breakthroughs in the hard sciences are generally collaborations involving dozens, sometimes hundreds of researchers working in separate but interlocking fields. Two teams totalling 1,500 scientists, for example, were behind the landmark detection earlier this year of a so-called intermediate mass black hole.

Major advances in science have also become hugely reliant on technology, which is sometimes used - especially in physics - to detect phenomena theorized to exist before today's scientists were even born. "The Nobel Committee's refusal to make an award to more than three people had led to manifest injustices," Martin Rees, Britain's Astronomer Royal since 1995 and former president of the Royal Society said. Indeed, the recent history of the Nobels is littered with what some have called "deserving losers", a fourth man or woman who would have likely shared in the prize without that limitation.

Rees cited the late Tom Kibble for his work on the elusive sub-atomic particle that came to be known as the Higgs boson. Others lament the failure to recognize American virologist Robert Gallo for his contribution to the discovery of HIV, Rosalind Franklin for her pioneering work on DNA, and Italian physicist Adalberto Giuzotto for his role in detecting gravitational waves. Giuzotto died a month after the prize for that discovery was handed out in 2017.

Three's the limit

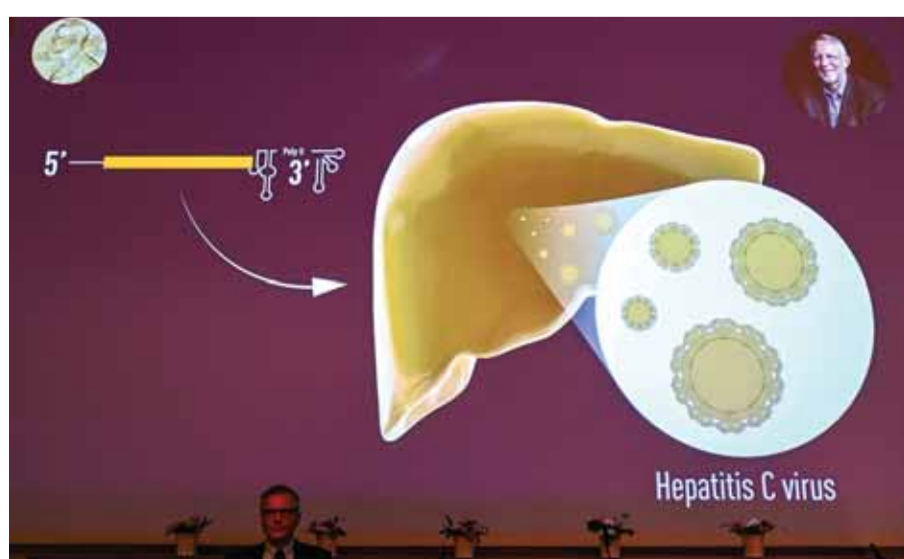
"It has also given a misleading impression of how 'big science' actually advances," added Rees, who notes the prize has excluded "large tracts of science," including mathematics and the environmental sciences. Even the most

ardent defenders of Nobel Prize and its arguably archaic rules acknowledge that science has shifted dramatically since the era of Einstein, Monsieur and Madame Curie, and Karl Landsteiner, the Austrian biologist who figured out in the 1920s that we have blood types. "There has been an enormous change since the early 1900s," Erling Norrby, a Swedish virologist and long-time pillar of the Nobel establishment, told AFP by phone.

"It is true that in modern science you often have very large groups of people interacting," added Norrby, who helped confer Nobels in medicine for 25 years, and has cast votes for the prizes in physics and chemistry since the early 1980s. "But the question is whether we can identify the one or two leaders. I think we can see who has taken the initiative." To some extent, faculty from the Karolinska Institute, which grants the Nobel for medicine, and the Royal Swedish Academy of Science, which does the same for physics and chemistry, have shifted with the times.

From 1920 to 1930, 23 of 30 awards were given to an individual scientist, and in the decade after World War II solo winners numbered 19. In the first twenty years of this century, that has only happened on four occasions, with three-way awards given out 41 times. In medicine, the number of possible recipients was expanded to three in 1934 (for the discovery of the B12 vitamin), with the first three-way prizes for chemistry and physics in 1946 and 1956, respectively.

But the rules have evolved no further, which means the Nobels cannot directly recompense the large, international experiments that have become the backbone of so much modern science. Norrby conceded that Europe's CERN - which runs the world's largest particle physics laboratory and conducted the experiments to detect the Higgs boson - would probably have shared in that Nobel if the rules had allowed, as they do for the Peace Prize. — AFP



Nobel Committee member Patrik Ernfors sits in front of a screen displaying the work field of the winners of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine during a press conference at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm yesterday. — AFP



Netflix India releases 3 episodes of 'Bad Boy Billionaires'

Netflix has partially released its much-awaited series on four Indian tycoons facing fraud allegations after a state court lifted an injunction over the weekend, a lawyer representing Netflix said yesterday. The "Bad Boy Billionaires: India" documentary series about liquor tycoon Vijay Mallya, Subrata Roy of the Sahara group, IT executive Ramalinga Raju and jeweler Nirav Modi was set for release last month. Netflix, the world's largest streaming service, suspended the show's release after an order from the Araria district court in eastern Bihar state where the Sahara group argued it would damage Roy's reputation.

Late on Saturday, the court lifted the injunction, said Amit Shrivastava, a lawyer for Netflix. He declined to comment further and it was not immediately clear why the court overturned its previous order. The official order is yet to be released. Netflix did not respond to a request for comment. A spokesman for Sahara also did not respond. Roy is currently on bail, having been ordered by a court to repay billions of dollars to investors in a scheme which was found to be illegal.

Roy denied wrongdoing in the case and his counsel has said he already has repaid investors. Some Netflix shows in India have faced court challenges and police complaints for obscenity or for hurting religious sentiments. The ongoing legal spat is among the most high-profile ones Netflix has faced in India, one of its key growth markets. The streaming company had argued that halting the show's release "freezes free speech" and hurts the company financially, Reuters has reported.

Yesterday, Netflix made three of the four episodes in the series available on its app for viewers in India. The episode focusing on Raju was unavailable. Raju, who was accused of a \$1 billion accounting fraud more than a decade ago, has obtained a separate injunction on its telecast from a court in south India. The case would be heard later on, A Venkatesh, a lawyer for Raju said. The other two tycoons - Modi and Mallya - are facing extradition attempts and are currently in the United Kingdom. Both have denied wrongdoing. — Reuters