Japan author, "spooky" science up for cut-price Nobels

Patrick Lannin, Reuters

(Reuters) - A Japanese author who writes of love and isolation, researchers into "spooky" quantum physics and experts on economic inequality have all been tipped as possible Nobel Prize-winners ahead of the start to the annual awards on Monday.

Medicine, physics and chemistry laureates will receive their Nobels first in Stockholm next week, followed later by economics. But for many outside the world of science, the literature and peace prizes are the most widely discussed at the dinner table.

Odds at British bookmaker Ladbrokes and Sweden's Unibet put Japanese author Haruki Murakami and Chinese writer Mo Yan in the top two places for the literature prize. An American advocate of non-violent struggle and a Coptic Christian who runs a children's mission in Egypt are favored for the peace prize.

Murakami is very popular in Japan, but has also become well known abroad for his works which deal with isolation and love and bring the surreal into everyday life. Mo's works are rooted in his native China [1], its history and people.

Other literary names bandied about include Ireland's William Trevor, Syrian poet Adonis, South Korean poet Ko Un, U.S. novelist Philip Roth and singer/songwriter Bob Dylan.

Culture columnist Maria Schottenius of Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter said that despite the odds, the choice of the Nobel committee was always unpredictable.

"Last year we had a poet, now it could be a storyteller like Philip Roth," Schottenius said. Swedish poet Thomas Transtromer won the prize in 2011.

For the peace prize, betting agencies favour Gene Sharp, an American advocate of non-violent struggle and Maggie Gobran, a Coptic Christian who runs a children's mission in Egypt, but there is no clear candidate.

TELEPORTATION

Researchers who wrote the rulebook for quantum teleportation, described as "spooky" by Albert Einstein, are among the 2012 Thomson Reuters tips for science.

Research into the inner workings of the cell could be in line for the medicine prize, according to Nobel prediction expert David Pendlebury. His annual forecasts are based on the company's "Web of Knowledge" data on how often a scientist's published papers are cited as a basis for further investigation.

For economics, Thomson Reuters has predicted U.S. and British experts on pricing financial assets, how to measure inequality or how to understand market volatility, as possible winners.

In chemistry, Akira Fujishima at Tokyo University of Science, could be in the running for discoveries of new uses for titanium dioxide, long used mainly as an ingredient for paint.

Though their prestige remains undiminished, the cash element for the annual prizes created in dynamite tycoon Alfred Nobel's will to recognize achievements in medicine, physics, chemistry, literature and peace -- economics was added in the 1960s at the behest of the Swedish central bank -- have been cut by 20 percent to 8 million crowns ($1.20 million).

The Nobel Foundation which oversees the wealth left by the businessman said it was worried about future returns and that it had been hit by overspending in previous years' prize seasons.

The deliberations on all the prizes are wrapped in secrecy. For literature, the 18 members of the Swedish Academy who award the Nobel prize for literature, are only allowed to discuss the prize within the walls of the Academy itself.

It is extremely rare for the name of any winner to leak out, though 2010 was an exception when newspaper Svenska Dagbladet got a tip that test tube baby pioneer Robert Edwards had won.

The prize for medicine will begin the Nobel season on Monday, followed by physics and chemistry over the next two days. The literature prize will likely be handed out on Thursday October 11 or 18th, while the peace prize will be awarded in Oslo on Friday October 12th and the prize for economics on October 15th.

($1 = 6.6889 Swedish crowns)

(Editing by Alistair Scrutton and Paul Casciato)

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