SIMON SINGH WINS MAIDEN LEELAVATI AWARD

Simon Lehna Singh, the well-known physicist-turned British author, journalist and TV producer, who specializes in popular writing on mathematical and scientific topics, has been chosen for the Leelavati Award that has been instituted for outstanding contributions to public outreach in mathematics by an individual.

This new international award (see press release of June 7; URL: www.icm2010.org.in/wp-content/icmfiles/docs/LilavatiPrize.pdf will be given away at the upcoming 2010 International Congress of Mathematicians (ICM 2010) to be held at Hyderabad, India, during 19–27 August. The Congress is the most important international congregation of mathematicians organized every four years by the International Mathematical Union (IMU).

The Award carries a citation and a cash prize of one million Indian rupees (approx. US $20,000), which will be presented to Singh at the closing ceremony of the ICM 2010 on 27 August.

The selection of the winner was made by a committee of five eminent mathematicians chaired by M. S. Narasimhan (India). Other members of the Committee were Laszlo Lovasz (Hungary; President, IMU), John Ball (U.K.; past-President, IMU), Jacob Palis (Brazil; past-President, IMU) and M. S. Raghunathan (India). M. S. Raghunathan is also the Chairman of the Executive Organizing Committee (EOC), ICM 2010.

Singh was born on 1 January 1964 to Indian parents who emigrated to the U.K. in 1950 from the state of Punjab in India. He grew up in Wellington, Somerset, and did his schooling there. He studied physics at the Imperial College, London, and later got his doctorate in particle physics working at the Emmanuel College, Cambridge University as well as at CERN, Geneva.

In 1990 he joined BBC's 'Science and Features' department and in 1996 directed a BAFTA Award winning documentary *Fermat's Last Theorem*. This was after the acclaimed solution, by the British mathematician Andrew Wiles in 1995, of one of the world's most challenging problems in mathematics – the proof of the famous conjecture made by the French mathematician Pierre de Fermat in 1637. This documentary exploration of the celebrated problem also formed the subject for Singh's first book, *Fermat's Last Theorem* (1997). This was perhaps the first-ever popular book on mathematics to become a best-seller.

His other popular works on mathematics include *The Code Book -- The Secret History of Codes and Code Breaking* (1999), which was his second book. This time around, the book resulted in a television serial called *The Science of Secrecy*. He has also produced a trilogy of serials for BBC Radio 4 on numbers. The first, *Five Numbers* (2002), was a quirky look at the five most important numbers in mathematics – 0, pi, the Golden Ratio, square root of –1 (the imaginary 'i') and infinity. The second, *Another Five Numbers* (2003), looked at five numbers that lie at the heart of some of the trickiest problems in mathematics. The third, *A Further Five Numbers* (2005), looked at the histories, uses and idiosyncrasies of five special numbers.

Singh has been previously honoured with the following awards:

- Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2003
- Doctor of Letters (*Honoris Causa*) by Loughborough University in 2003
- Honorary Degree in Mathematics by Southampton University in 2005
- Doctor of Design by University of the West of England in 2006
- Kelvin Medal from the Institute of Physics in 2008

- Doctor of Science (*Honoris Causa*) by Royal Holloway, University of London in 2008.

The Leelavati prize is named after the 12th Century mathematical treatise ‘Leelavati’ – devoted to arithmetic and algebra – by the Indian mathematician Bhaskara II, also known as Bhaskaracharya. In the book the author posed, in verse form, a series of problems in (elementary) arithmetic to one Leelavati (perhaps this was his daughter) and followed them up with hints to solutions. This work appears to have been the main source of learning arithmetic and algebra in medieval India. The work was also translated into Persian and was influential in West Asia.

Though the Prize has been instituted as a one-time award by the EOC of ICM 2010, the Committee is making efforts towards making it a regular feature at future ICMs.
