

## Frenchman awarded for work in Ladakh

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Oct 01, 2000 12:40 Hrs (IST)

New York: Laurent Pordié, a Frenchman who helped revive traditional Tibetan medicine to improve healthcare in the Indian region of Ladakh, is one of five winners of the biennial Rolex Awards for Enterprise presented here.

Pordié, an anthropologist and ethno-pharmacologist, set up a program called "Traditional medicine for survival" in 1988. He plans to use his award to fund seminars and public awareness campaigns and to acquire medicinal supplies.

Winners were selected from 2000 applicants worldwide who made outstanding achievements in the areas of science, environment, technology and exploration. Each wins \$75,000 to continue his or her work.

The other awardees were Mohammed Bah Abba, a Nigerian teacher who has created an innovative earthenware cooling system to preserve perishable foods in developing countries; Elizabeth Nicholls, a Canadian American paleontologist; Maria Eliza Manteca Onate, an Ecuadorian environmentalist who is promoting sustainable farming techniques in the Andes, and David Schweidenback, a former US Peace Corps volunteer and New Jersey resident, who is recovering bicycles from the United States to provide affordable transportation in the developing world.

"The award is not for myself but for the 'Amchis' and my 12-member team," Pordié told India Abroad News Service. Amchis are traditional doctors who provide their skills free of charge, with villagers shouldering their farming chores in return. But the introduction of conventional modern medicine and a growth in social mobility have seen that kind of barter system fail and the disappearance of Amchi skills.

**India Abroad News Service**

Buddha himself is said to have developed the Tibetan system of medicine 2,500 years ago. It is based on a holistic philosophy where illness results from an imbalance of bodily or mental states due to four possible reasons: climate, diet, behavior or the influence of demons.

Pordié's aims are to educate individuals from Amchi families, as well as new students, in the ancient system, to set up banks of medicinal drugs accessible to all on a fee-paying basis, and to develop Amchi medicine projects in alliance with government bodies.

In 1999, he launched a three-year diploma course in Amchi medicine. "It is essential to allow the practitioners in Ladakh to be recognized and accredited by the central government," he said.

"It was not easy to work in India and to be accepted by the local government," he said. "I had to explain to the Amchis and the people about the program. It took some time for them to clear their suspicions and doubts. Now it's okay -- we are friends. I feel I'm at home when I go to Ladakh. In the beginning it was a struggle to be recognized." Pordié who has been working in India for the last three years now, sums it up as a "wonderful and lifetime experience."

He produces a bimonthly journal in the Tibetan language with the aim of bringing the Amchis together in a professional network. "It's the first trans-national medical education newsletter based in Ladakh," he said. "The journal is edited and published from Delhi."

