



# Nobel Laureates Transitioned to National Leaders

[Source: IE](#)

## Why in News?

The recent news of **Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate of 2006**, set to assume leadership of **Bangladesh's interim government** has reignited interest in the history of Nobel laureates who have served as heads of state.

- Yunus is known for his work in **microfinance and poverty alleviation**. His expertise in economics and social entrepreneurship may shape the interim government's focus on **poverty reduction and economic development**.

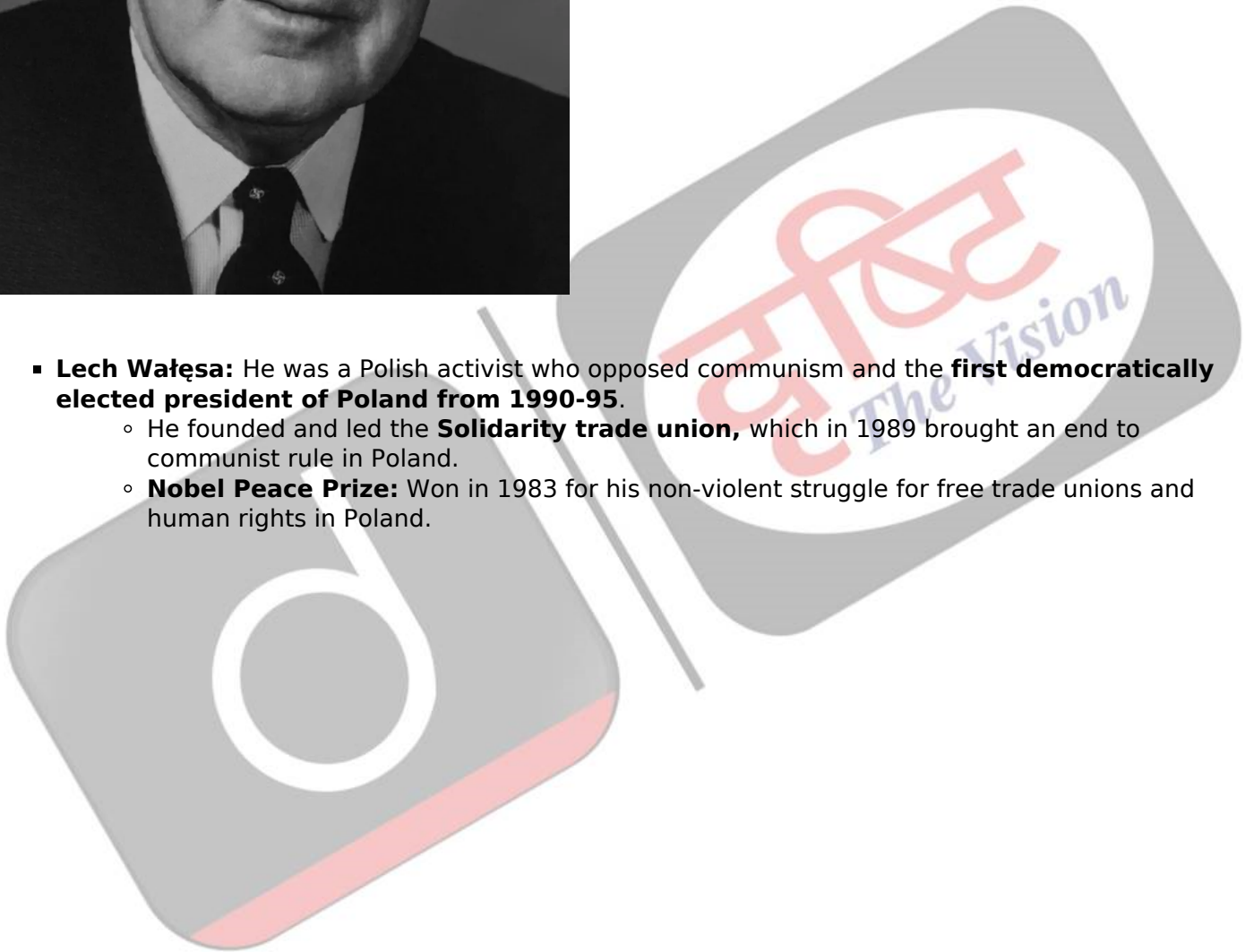
## Who are the Other Nobel Laureates Who Led Their Countries?

- **Lester B. Pearson:** Served as the Canadian prime minister from 1963 to 1968, and a leader of the Liberal Party.
  - He introduced a **national pension plan**, and a family assistance program, **broadened old-age security benefits**, and laid the groundwork for universal healthcare in Canada.
  - **Nobel Peace Prize:** Awarded in 1957 for his role in **resolving the Suez Crisis**, where he came up with the idea of the **UN's first large-scale peacekeeping force** after hostilities commenced, allowing the aggressors to withdraw their forces appear to have been defeated.

//



- **Lech Wałęsa:** He was a Polish activist who opposed communism and the **first democratically elected president of Poland from 1990-95**.
  - He founded and led the **Solidarity trade union**, which in 1989 brought an end to communist rule in Poland.
  - **Nobel Peace Prize:** Won in 1983 for his non-violent struggle for free trade unions and human rights in Poland.





- **Aung San Suu Kyi:** She was the **State Counsellor of Myanmar, the de-facto head of the government equivalent to a prime minister**, from 2016 to 2021 after leading Myanmar's transition from military rule to partial democracy in the 2010s.
  - Suu Kyi rose to prominence during the uprising of 1988 when she founded the **anti-junta National League for Democracy (NLD)**.
    - She led Myanmar's transition to partial democracy, although her tenure has been marred by controversy.
  - **Nobel Peace Prize:** Awarded in 1991 "for her non-violent struggle for democracy and human rights" in Myanmar.



- **Nelson Mandela:** He was the **first Black president of South Africa**, elected in 1994 after the **peaceful termination of the apartheid system**, for which he and President Frederik Willem

de Klerk were awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize in 1993**.

- Mandela joined the African National Congress in 1943 and was repeatedly arrested for his anti-apartheid activities, eventually being sentenced to life in prison in 1962. After 27 years in prison, he was released in 1990 and over the next four years **negotiated a peaceful end to apartheid with de Klerk**.



- **José Ramos-Horta:** He has been the president of East Timor since 2022. He was a leader of the **resistance movement that led to East Timor's independence from Indonesia in 2002**, the first new sovereign state of the 21st century.
  - **Nobel Peace Prize:** Won in 1996 for advocating for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in East Timor.

#### Note:

- Many other leaders have won after serving their terms as heads of state (**former Israel PM Shimon Peres or former US President Jimmy Carter**) or during their terms (**former US President Barack Obama, former UK PM Winston Churchill and Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed**).
- Of the 30 Nobel recipients to serve as a country's head of state/government, 29 won the Nobel Peace Prize with **Winston Churchill, who won the Nobel for Literature in 1953, the only exception**.

#### Why is it Significant to have Nobel Laureates in Leadership Roles?

- **Symbol of Hope:** Their recognition often brings international attention and credibility to their leadership.
- **Advocacy for Peace and Justice:** Nobel laureates are frequently associated with ideals of peace, democracy, and human rights, setting a moral precedent for governance.
- **Inspiration for Future Leaders:** Their journeys can inspire emerging leaders to pursue significant social and political change.
  - However, it's important to acknowledge that **not all Nobel laureates** have been successful in translating their esteemed recognition into effective governance, as

evidenced by the **challenges faced by leaders like Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed (Nobel Peace Prize in 2019) and Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi.**

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### Prelims

**Q. Who among the following scientists shared the Nobel Prize in Physics with his son? (2008)**

- (a) Max Planck
- (b) Albert Einstein
- (c) William Henry Bragg
- (d) Enrico Fermi

**Ans: (c)**

**Q. Nobel Prize winning scientist James D. Watson is known for his work in which area? (2008)**

- (a) Metallurgy
- (b) Meteorology
- (c) Environmental protection
- (d) Genetics

**Ans: (d)**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/nobel-laureates-transitioned-to-national-leaders>

