Luc Montagnier - Discoverer of HIV Virus

KP Anand*, Y Satapathy**, AS Kashyap**

Luc Montagnier was born in Chabris, near Tours, France in 1932. He studied natural sciences at University of Paris in 1955 and qualified for Doctorate in Medicine in 1960. He became research director of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in 1974 and Professor at the Pasteur Institute in 1985.

In 1982 he had no inkling of his name being permanently etched on panels of Medical History when he was asked for assistance for establishing the possible underlying retroviral cause of a new mysterious syndrome AIDS by Dr. Willy Rozenbaum, a clinician at the Bichat Hospital in Paris. Montagnier and his team discovered the causative virus of AIDS in 1983 from a lymph node biopsy taken from one of Rozenbaum’s patients; naming it lymphadenopathy associated virus of LAV. A year later another team led by Dr. Robert Gallo of USA claimed the discovery of the virus but they named it human T lymphotrophic virus type III (HTLV-III). This led to considerable and acrimonious controversy regarding discovery of virus which could be sorted out only after a meeting between President Mitterrand of France and President Ronald Reagan of the USA. In 1986 both the French and US names of the virus (LAV and HTLV-III) were dropped in favour of the new term Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Thus, confirmed as the discoverer of virus causing AIDS, Montagnier accepted Professorship at Queen's College, New York, USA in 1998, and held the charge of Centre for Molecular and Cellular Biology. He heads the AIDS and Retrovirus Department at the Pasteur Institute. Luc Montagnier is the co-founder of the World foundation for AIDS Research and Prevention and codirects the Programme for International Viral Collaboration. He has received more than 20 major awards, including the Commandeur de la Legion d’Honneur, the Lasker Prize and the Gairdner prize. Luc Montagnier features in one of the six, 25 NU Bhutan Stamps brought out in Year 2000 to commemorate ‘breakthroughs in modern medicine’ in last 100 years.