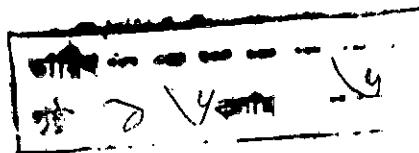


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The recipients of Ananya Top Ten-2000 Award were seen with Poet Shamsul over to them at Begum Sufia Kamal Auditorium at National Museum on Sunday

## SAARC Satellite for reducing internet cost urged

KATHMANDU, Feb 4:— South Asian business leaders in a SAARC economic conference here Sunday recommended establishment of a SAARC Satellite to reduce cost of internet usage, reports UNB.

Such satellite will also help development of the overall communications system, they said in a technical session on "Information Technology (IT) for Economic Development" as the sector emerged as the fastest-growing economic activity in the current global order.

Under the present system based on V-sat, an Internet user has to dial into the server of the internet service provider (ISP) and then satellite link for entering the internet, which is often slow due to low bandwidth with high costs and are not viable for its mass use, e-commerce, e-business and so on.

The conference in this session also recommended for the SAARC governments to form separate departments of ministries on IT for the development of the sector and suggested deregulation of the telecommunications sector where it is still regulated.

"By having a satellite of SAARC origin, cost would be reduced with higher speed," said MA Mumin, SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) Executive Member Mumin, who chaired the session on IT of the daylong economic conference of SAARC.

Earlier addressing the inaugural session, SAARC Secretary General Nihal Rodrigo focused on a digital divide between the developed and developing hemispheres of the world which he said is a result of other more critical divides.

"While South Asian knowledge workers and IT specialists are widely welcomed beyond South Asia, the actual challenge for the region, in practical terms, is to adopt and adapt IT to development needs also and to enhance thereby the quality of life in South Asia," he said.

He quoted Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee as describing IT as "a development tool powerful enough to banish pov-

erty and backwardness and make India a land of opportunity for all."

"SCCI joint groups need to be constituted to contribute in issues of common interest in order to be prepared for the meetings," said SCCI Vice-President Padma Jyoti.

He said the business community of the respective member countries should be consulted while negotiating SAPTA and SAFTA, aimed at freeing trade in the region from tariff and non-tariff barriers.

Other speakers pointed out that there was poor representation of SAARC countries in the WTO and suggested that support of other countries should be sought to improve the representation.