

REQUEST FROM MAHABIR PUN ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE OF NEPAL FOR

ONE DOLLAR A MONTH

"One Dollar a Month for a Wireless Nepal"

TO BUILD WIRELESS BROADBAND INFORMATION HIGHWAY ACROSS NEPAL

Dear Friends,

I am Mahabir Pun and I have been invited to attend the ANA (Associations of Nepalis in Americas) Convention 2008 being held in Baltimore, Maryland as "A Distinguished Guest." I have accepted the invitation with pleasure and hope to see all of you there. I am going to request **all the Nepalese regardless of your current residence as well as friends of non-Nepali origin** around the world for \$1 a month support for the next five years to build a wireless broadband information highway across Nepal. I would also like to request all of you **to encourage your younger and older children to initiate the campaign among their peers in schools** so that they can learn from their early age to be involved in projects like these for good causes.

1. What have we done so far?

For the last 15 years I am working in the mountains of Nepal as a social worker. In 1993, I helped to start a community school, Himanchal Higher Secondary School in Myagdi district. With the school as the center for implementing development projects I am involved with education, healthcare, nature conservation, income generating programs and other community works. Along with the local village community I am moving ahead with a goal to build a 4-year college in our mountain village by 2015 and eventually a university later on.

In 2003, Himanchal Higher Secondary School formally started a project called the Nepal Wireless Networking Project (<http://www.nepalwireless.net>) under its management committee. Its purpose was to build long-range wireless networks using Wi-fi technology in the mountain villages of Myagdi, Kaski and Parbat districts. We received technical support from foreign volunteers for this project. The wireless project has gotten significant exposure in the international media because of its simple and low cost approach to connect rural areas and provide education, healthcare, and communication services. With the technical support of Nepal Wireless Networking Project, the wireless network has been replicated on smaller scale by organizations in Makawanpur, Dolakha, Lalitpur, Palpa, Bajhang, Achham, Ilam and Solukhumbu districts of Nepal. Even if it is progressing at a slow pace, we are moving ahead with a definite goal to provide the benefits of wireless technology to 80% of people living in the rural areas in the mountains and plains of Nepal.

As recognition of introducing information and communication technologies in the Himalayan villages, I was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award 2007, the highest such honor in the Asian Region. I was also awarded an Honorary Degree; *Doctor of Humane Letters*, from my alma-mater the University of Nebraska in 2007. I wish to thank all volunteers involved with me, as it is recognition for all of them.

2. What is our main goal of introducing ICT in rural Nepal?

Our goal is not just to bring Internet to the rural areas as we have found that the contents available in English language on the Internet are not much useful for ordinary villagers. But, we want to provide maximum benefits of the wireless technology to the people of rural areas, regardless. To meet our

goals we have been working with several institutions and organizations that are providing the following assistances;

1. Develop educational contents in local language for school children and rural people
2. Provide telemedicine services from city hospitals to rural clinics
3. Develop voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) services for cheaper communication
4. Provide remittance service in villages to help people working abroad send money
5. Provide credit card acceptance services to tourist in the trekking routes
6. Start local e-commerce service through e-bulletin boards to help villagers sell products

3. What is my main agenda of this trip to the US?

As the team leader of the project, my only agenda for this trip to the US is to launch “**One Dollar a Month**” campaign to build wireless broadband information highway across Nepal. Our project wants to connect as many villages as possible and provide supplemental services as mentioned above. Therefore, we would like to request various individuals and Nepalese organizations across the world to contribute and help run the campaign. Our target for 2008 is to have 15,000 members signed-up with the campaign. We want 50,000 members in 5 years. We urge you to donate at least \$1 a month for five years to give this priceless gift to the Nepali people, who live in remote areas and are cut off from outside world. You are also welcome to donate more than \$1 a month if you wish.

4. What is our long-term goals and sustainability plan?

You might ask us why we need to build wireless broadband highway and how we can make it sustainable. Let us clarify with some examples.

Nepal has built broadband information highway using fiber optic cable along the East West Highway in the southern belt with the help of the Government of India. Most of the major cities of Nepal will be connected with fiber in future. However, it will be very difficult and expensive to bring optical fiber lines to villages located on the mountains and isolated areas of the Terai region. In this scenario, wireless is the best, the cheapest and the fastest options to connect the isolated villages located in inner valleys, mountains and the Terai to the major cities of the country.

Based upon our experiences in Myagdi and other districts through Nepal Wireless Networking Project, we have the following long term plans.

1. Build four major relay stations on average in each district to reach out to villages located on different slopes and corners of the mountains. We plan to provide an average of 5 Mbps local bandwidth to each village and connect the villages through the relay stations to the fiber highway in the cities. If necessary we will build secondary relay stations as well.
2. Build about eight regional base stations and a central control station with servers to monitor and maintain the network and provide connectivity to rural schools, and businesses.
3. Connect the network to government and private hospitals to provide telemedicine service.
4. Build a central data center to provide educational, healthcare, agricultural, e-commerce, and e-governance contents in local language for the use of students and villagers.
5. Introduce VOIP phone services and remittance services in the villages and generate income to pay for monthly operation and maintenance cost.
6. Work with public and private partners on district and local levels to find ways to make the highway financially sustainable and to introduce services that would be useful for the villagers.
7. Encourage local entrepreneurs to become rural Internet service provider.

8. Work with the government of Nepal for introducing e-governance programs in the Village Development Committees (VDCs). Keep requesting the government for funds to provide computers, telemedicine services, and contents in local language
9. Request international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and UNDP to provide matching funds for the rapid expansion of the network.

5. How can \$1 campaign build wireless broadband highway?

Some of you might ask if \$1 a month campaign will be able to create enough funds to build the electronic highway all over Nepal. That is an appropriate question. We would like to explain briefly how it is possible to build the highway in the following paragraphs.

The cost to build one major relay station for the highway ranges from US\$8,000 to US\$ 15,000 depending upon the availability of power at a relay station and the equipment we need to use. The cost for the wireless equipment to connect a village from the relay station is about US\$1,000 to US\$1,500. It costs from US\$1,500 to US\$2,000 to buy computers and hardware for setting up a computer lab with five computers and a printer in a rural school or a communication center. Villagers will also buy them from local resources.

With 15,000 supporters we are targeting to enroll this year, it would mean US\$180,000 in funding annually. That means in the first year, we can build about 12 major relay stations and connect about 40 villages. If we have 30,000 supporters we can build 24 relay stations and connect 80 villages serving approximately 70,000 people on average. Think about that. With each supporter committing just one dollar a month, we can get to serving 50,000 people every year, who are seriously disadvantaged in many ways, and we can keep adding more and more.

Using these metrics, we have submitted a proposal to Nepal Government recently to build wireless broadband information highway covering 19 rural districts of Nepal. The total estimated cost is approximately three million in US dollars that includes the cost for building computer labs in 190 schools for e-education and connecting 38 rural clinics for telemedicine. The government is positive about the proposal but has indicated a shortfall in available funds. We would ask Nepal Government for matching fund every year for the project, of which we are very hopeful.

Thus, we believe that its' an achievable goal to build an information highway in rural Nepal. We believe that this is one of the ways we can narrow down the widely talked about digital divide.

6. How will we collect the contribution and use it?

In a few years we would like this project to be operated by a not-for-profit organization, owned by public and private partners, and sustained beyond the initial installation phase by revenues generated from services. Until we come to that point, my suggestion for now is to use the mechanism that we already have developed for managing, monitoring, reporting, and fund raising under Himanchal Higher Secondary School. This is a community school and it is partially supported by Himanchal Education Foundation (<http://www.himanchal.org>), based in Kearney, Nebraska. This is where I got my college education. The foundation was established in 2000 by some of my American professors and friends to help our project in Nepal. It is a 501 (c3) not-for-profit corporation in the USA.

You still might ask why Himanchal and why not other organization? The reason I am suggesting it is to leverage the existing setup in the US and Nepal. It will make much easier to get the funding, run the wireless networking project, keep the donors updated about the funds and progress, and provide

transparent accounting updates on how and where the funds are being used. Additionally, donors can also get tax benefits

You can go to <http://www.himanchal.org/contribute-one-dollar-a-month.html> to set up an annual recurring charge of \$12 (i.e. one contribution of \$12 each year) instead of having 12 separate monthly transactions of \$1 each. Or if you wish to set up your contribution of \$1 on monthly basis, you can do it through <http://nepalwireless.thamel.com>. Please note that Networkforgood.org do not accept less than \$10 per transaction. Either way, the money comes to our school's bank account.

For those, who don't have credit cards or would like to donate cash, we would like to request you to collect money through your local community organization and contact us at contact@himanchal.org. We will assist you to send the money to our bank account through our remittance partners.

7. Our Utmost Request

Dear friends, as Margaret Mead said, *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has"*. The idea of one dollar a month had come from a small group of people working with Nepal Wireless Project. Now we want more people to join it. By participating in this campaign, you will become poorer by \$1 a month, but Nepal will get richer by several thousands and eventually by millions of dollar.

This is our combined effort to build the "New Nepal". With all of us, as a team, we can make this happen. What we should strongly believe is that, if drops of water can form an ocean, why can't contributions of \$1 a month from 15,000 or more Nepalese from around the world, build broadband information highway across Nepal? Let us make this happen in five years without just relying upon and looking for grant or loan from international agencies. Together, let us prove that Nepalese can unite and rise to the occasion and not only generate long speeches, and stage rallies and strikes but also can make positive things happen. Let us initiate this exemplary endeavor that the people from around the world can learn from.

Finally, Nepal is reborn as a republican country. Each and every Nepali, regardless of their current residence, is hoping for peaceful and prosperous "New Nepal". However, the fact is that without economic revolution, only a political revolution will not be adequate. There are multiple examples of such political revolutions in the world history that have not worked well. On behalf of the people of Nepal, I would like to ask for your strong support for building one of the basic development infrastructures to bring economic revolution. Together, let us instate the economic revolution, by building wireless information highway to connect majority of rural Nepal with the global communities and to create new opportunities for our future generations. Your support can make this happen.

Thank you very much.

8. For Further Information

Mahabir Pun

E-mail: mahabir@himanchal.org
<http://www.himanchal.org>
<http://www.nepalwireless.net>
<http://www.nepalwireless.com.np>

<http://www.himanchal.org/contribute-one-dollar-a-month.html>