

Speech Given by Mahabir Pun at the Opening Ceremony of the 26th Convention Of Associations of Nepalis in America in Baltimore on July 4th, 2008

Chairman of the 26th Associations of Nepalis in America (ANA) convention, Honorable Ambassador of Nepal to the US, Distinguished guests, brothers and sisters from different parts of Nepal now living in different states of the United States of America and Canada

I would like to thank very much to the organizer of the 26th ANA convention in Baltimore for the invitation to attend this conference as a distinguished guest. It is my pleasure to be here, to meet all of you and share the visions and thoughts I have for helping our beloved country, Nepal. The reason I am very thankful is that this is going to be a historic convention to all of us because it is going to create a platform for the development of Information and Communication Technology in rural Nepal.

I would also like to thank the Nepali organizations and Nepalese friends living in different states of the United States of America for inviting me to visit their cities such as Seattle, San Francisco, Portland, Minneapolis, Denver, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, New York, and Boston after this convention. My special thanks go to Sirish Bhojpure from Denver, who is working very hard for more than two months to arrange all the schedules of my one-month long campaign across the states. And I thank the Nepali students and the alumni of the University of Nebraska at Kearney for contributing towards my travel expenses to and from Nepal.

Allow me to start with my background in brief because many of you might not know who I am and what I am doing in Nepal. For the last 16 years I am working in Nepal as a social worker and volunteer. After I graduated from the University of Nebraska 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, health care, nature conservation, income generating programs and other community works. Along with the local village communities we are moving ahead with a goal to build a 4-year college in the 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 under its management committee in a very dangerous and unfavorable political situation in Nepal. The purpose was to build long-range wireless networks using Wi-fi technology to connect the mountain villages of Myagdi, Kaski and Parbat districts. 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, health care, and communication services.

With the technical support of Nepal Wireless Networking Project, the wireless network has been replicated on smaller scale by some other organizations in Makawanpur, Dolakha, Lalitpur, Palpa, Bajhang, Achham, Ilam and Solukhumbu districts of Nepal. Even if it is progressing at much slower pace than we would like it to go, 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 Terai regions of Nepal.

As all of you know I was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay Award 2007, as recognition for introducing information and communication technologies in the Himalayan villages.

I wish to thank all volunteers and supporters involved with me, as it was the recognition for all of them as well.

Many of my close friends call me “a strange animal”. I am a strange person in a sense that I don’t care at all for the recognitions or awards or praises of any kind. The reason I accepted the Ramon Magsaysay Award was because I thought it was the recognition for Nepal and Nepalese. Moreover, it was attached with US\$50,000 that was very useful to run projects in Nepal.

However, I would like to tell that the recognition is not the end of my life and I am not going to stop there. With your help I want to do more because we can do more good things to help our brothers and sisters in Nepal if we **unite** for a good cause no matter where we live. All of us know that there is strength in the unity.

Therefore I am in the US now for a campaign at a time when the political campaigns are speeding up in America for presidential election. Be sure that I am not here for a campaign to support either the Republicans or the Democrats.

I would like to tell frankly that the campaign I am talking about is not a political campaign because I am not a political creature. This campaign is about bringing revolution using Information and Communication technology in rural Nepal in the field of education, health care, e-commerce and communication to help people there.

We have given a name to this campaign as “**Donate One Dollar a Month** to help build broadband information highway in Nepal”. The goal is not only to build the information highway but to provide different kinds of services to rural people such as;

- Provide educational contents in local language for school children and villagers
- Provide telemedicine services from city hospitals to rural clinics
- Provide voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) services for cheaper communication
- Provide remittance service in villages to help people working abroad send money back home
- Provide credit card acceptance services to tourist in the trekking routes
- Start local e-commerce services to help villagers sell their products

Dear friends, there are three more things I would like to make very clear today.

First, we will connect remote villages of both the mountain region and Terai region with the money that we will raise through this campaign. Because it is not only in the mountain region, there are remote villages in the Terai region of Nepal as well.

Second, this campaign is not only about raising money, it is about showing the unity of Nepalese for good cause no matter where we live, no matter what ethnic background we have, no matter what political affiliation or religious faith we have. It is about establishing that special “humane connection” between Nepal and its friends living abroad. Think about this seriously.

Third, I would like to make very clear that I did not come here to compete with different Nepali organizations to raise money to help Nepal. I know that you have been already

doing tremendous work to help Nepal by raising funds and sending your support to Nepal. I came here just to request all of you **to add one more dollar** to what you have already been donating.

Many people are asking if \$1 a month campaign will raise enough money to build broadband information highway in Nepal. I would say that we **definitely** don't need to raise more than one dollar a month on yearly basis for some years to build not only broadband information highway but we can build many more things through such campaign. We can build schools and colleges. We can build hospitals. We can build hydro power stations. We can build many more things to help the rural people in Nepal year by year and step by step.

Let me tell you how it is possible. According to the statistics given to me by Non-Residence Nepali Association, there are 2 million Nepalese living all over the world. If we get just 5% of these Nepalese populations signed up for this campaign, we will have 100,000 supporters. With this number of people supporting for the information highway project, we can easily connect most of the rural Nepal in five years. After that we can do many more good things.

Dear friends, by participating in this campaign, you will become poorer by \$1 a month, but Nepal will get richer by hundreds of thousands and eventually by millions of dollar a year. Please participate. This is my humble request on behalf of the people of Nepal. I traveled half way around the world to make this request. And I am sure you will do it by your heart.

I have some volunteers helping me to set up a table outside this convention hall and to have supporters signed up for this campaign. I have fliers with information and I have forms to sign up. I am looking for more volunteers to reach to as many people as possible within three days now and afterwards. Please sign up to volunteer for this campaign with me.

Moreover, I would also like to have a meeting with the individuals and representatives of associations of Nepalese, who are attending this conference from other parts of the US and Canada. Please let I or one of the volunteers outside know about your interest. We will have a meeting together to make plans and strategies, and make this campaign successful.

Finally, Nepal is reborn as a republican country. Each and every Nepali, regardless of your current residence, is hoping for peaceful and prosperous 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. Therefore 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 from Baltimore by launching this campaign to build wireless information highway and 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.