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Ken Banks offers coaching, mentoring and strategy support.

Web pioneer

NATION

Nation | From Issue #360 (August 3-9, 2007)

Mahabir Pun put Nepal on the information technology map not by complaining about how the poor didn't have access to computers, but actually doing something about it.

He gave up a potentially lucrative dot com career in the US to return not just to Nepal, but take the information age to his remote ancestral village in Myagdi. This week, Pun received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for 2007 in recognition of his efforts to connect his village to the global village.



After returning from the US in 1997 to his village of Nangi, Pun started out with four computers and set them up at a school. He set up a wireless antenna on top of a tree to connect him to a server in Pokhara and connect his school to the internet.

"Given Nepal's topography and cost, the future is in wireless," Pun said this week. In 2001, with help from foreign volunteers, Pun rigged a wireless connection between Nangi and the neighboring village of Ramche using TV dish antennas. Today his Nepal Wireless Project in mid-western Nepal is a model of simple, effective, and successful rural internet access.

In five years, 22 villages in Myagdi and Parbat have been wired for just Rs 2 million. The network is used for education and to exchange information about locally produced goods and commodity prices, village activities, and

weekly markets. The wireless network also provides telemedicine facilities to eight villages with doctors from a Pokhara hospital.

Pun's model is proof that villages don't have to wait for landlines for communication, and the internet is not just a luxury.

Mallika Aryal

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