

Uma Bharti talk

Respected Jagatguru Shankaracharyaji, and esteemed guests on the dias, assembled sages, brothers and sisters.

I stopped the organiser from introducing me, he was full of praise and emotion. Many times it makes me nervous to hear myself being introduced. Therefore I said that there is no need. Today is significant for a reason that Giridhar Malviyaji has mentioned. Exactly a hundred years ago at Haridwar, Mahamana Malviyaji had entered into an agreement with the British about the Ganga. This was gazetted in 1916, but it is in 1914 that this was presented, discussed and approved.

I am amazed how this could happen, that Modi-ji chose Banaras to contest his elections. Banaras has always been identified with Baba Vishwanath. But Modiji said that he had been called here by the Ganga. Ganga was thus present in the election atmosphere. When he extended the cabinet, he established a ministry for the Ganga. I want to clarify that the ministry's name is NOT Ganga rejuvenation. Our prime minister said that it is not our place to restore the Ganga, the Ganga will restore us! The name of the ministry is therefore Ganga protection. The full name of the ministry as per the gazette notification is 'Water resources, river development and Ganga protection'.

Some unprecedented things have happened for the first time in these elections. This was the first time a non-Congress individual has secured a complete majority. Similarly, this is the first time in the world that a ministry has the name of a particular river in its title. Some of the main proponents of this are present here, and I would like to mention a few by name. One of those I have not met- I do not know if I have met him in a past life, but not in this one since I was only born in 1961. But I definitely feel connected to him. I stayed in Gangotri for a month before the temple (Pat? 3:30) opened. There is the Shri Krishna ashram there of the saint who had come here for the opening of the Kashi University. He always remained unclothed, even in the Himalayas. He would meditate in a deep hole that had been made for the purpose. His disciples instructed me to meditate in the same place. They would seat me in that deep hole, and I would meditate. I did not know where this connection would lead me. After a week of such meditation, I suddenly was overcome with the fear of an earthquake. I became convinced that I would be buried in that hole, and promptly got up and came out. I spoke with the leader of Shri Krishna Ashram and asked him why such a thought entered my head. He replied, 'You have meditated as much as you need. Any more, and you would be on the path of salvation. There is still much work that you need to do for the Ganga, and so she frightened you into getting up.' And he was right. I was frightened that day as I have never been before or since.

When I met Giridhar Malviyaji in Banaras, that journey of mine which began at Gangotri was completed. I have now joined the family to which the Mahamana also belongs, and he is present here. Indreshji, the head of the Himalayan family is also present here. He has supported me in every campaign for the Ganga that I have undertaken. He blessed me during my campaign for the Ganga before I became a minister. Today I felt as if God has decreed that he will be here. Jyotish Shankaracharyaji is also present here. All the people on the dais, and several seated in front of me have been connected with the Ganga campaign and have kept it going.

Now the Ministry of the Ganga has been formed, and the Ganga River Basin Authority is a part of this Ministry. First, the Ganga River was notified, and then the Ganga River Basin Authority. Finally, on 22 September, the Prime Minister made a change to the Ganga River Basin Authority. He appointed a deputy, since he himself is the chief of the Authority. This deputy was given the right to call a meeting of the Ganga River Basin Authority, to make decisions, and to implement these decisions. In this way, the water resources ministry became the head of the Ganga River Basin

Authority. On 20th October, there was a meeting of the Empowered Steering Committee in which the State secretaries and the secretaries of those Central Departments that are connected with the Ganga and its tributaries were present. They prepared an agenda, and on 27 October this agenda was approved in a meeting of the Ganga River Basin Authority in which representatives of all five concerned states were present as well as those of all concerned ministries. I too was present at that meeting. In the end, we took some decisions about the Ganga's *aviralta* (unimpeded flow) and *nirmalta* (unpolluted flow). We will begin to implement these decisions in 45 days. The impacts of these will be seen over varying periods, with some making themselves felt in one-and-a-half years and the others in twice that time.

Today an important issue has been raised- that of unimpeded flow. A committee has been formed for this, and will give us its report by 15 December. The reports of the Ravi Chopra Committee, the Chaturvedi Committee, and the IIT consortium will all be consulted. The Additional Secretaries of the Ministry of Environment and of the Ministry of Water Resources will give us a proposal that presents the site-specific and season-specific flows needed in the river. I have asked for three things, which I will specify in English. While I don't understand much English, sometimes the Hindi presented in Department documents is so intimidating that I need to take recourse to English! I have asked for river-specific, site-specific and rainfall-specific ecological flows. I will receive this report by 15 December.

At the same time, we are also looking at sandmining. This needs to be done, but in a scientific manner. Removing the accumulated sand is necessary, but it needs to be scientific and river-friendly. There is a committee for that, and they too will be giving me their report. Sandmining is connected with the unimpeded flows of the Ganga. The report on ecological flows, which will be compiled from these three reports, will be presented to the country.

Now for unpolluted flows. I was in Kanpur last week, and today I went along the Ganga from the pontoon bridge just before Assi to Varuna- which is essentially the extent of Varanasi-along with the officials of my department. I wanted the confidence to determine whether we could achieve this goal or not. Many technologies from all over the world have been presented to me. I have studied all of these. After this study, I have determined to inspect a few of these technologies. I, and a team, will be visiting a few sites in other countries.

But I myself went to see the Sabarmati- to see the riverfront development that Modi-ji has done in Gujarat. He stopped the drains, stopped chemical discharge, released ecological flow, and did some beautification. He restored the 'look' of the river and packaged it. When I went there, I spent the entire day there with the officials. I invited the man who had created the original concept to Delhi and organised a meeting with officials there. Now, I will organise a meeting where all the corporators of the cities along the Ganga from Gangotri to Gangasagar will be invited. A presentation on the Sabarmati will be done, which will show them how this riverfront development needs to be done. Today, all the officials were in agreement that the Sabarmati Riverfront development can be exactly replicated here between the Assi and the Varuna. I have determined that this riverfront development will be done, keeping in mind all the respect that is due to this city. All the components that go together to comprise an unpolluted river will be looked after.

The Ganga is an entity, concerning which the whole world is united. The media, whether print or audio-visual, are all concerned about the river. Everyone has written news, written editorials, and nearly every television channel has produced a programme on the Ganga. The interesting thing is that not one of these programmes is a repeat of the other, each concerns itself with a separate element of the Ganga. Now the people of the world are curious to know what will happen next. It was according to a writ in 1985, that actions began to be hurriedly implemented on the Ganga. Due to this, there is a fallacy that the Court is reprimanding us. But when I read the order of the court, I see that it is not so. There is an evaluation of the programmes since 1985, and so far there

is no evaluation of this programme, because it has not started yet. As I told you, it has only been approved on the 27th of October during the meeting of the Ganga River Basin Authority. We have presented the plans in front of the Court. When I then read the Court Order, I was stunned because far from scolding us, the Court had praised us. It also stated that the court should be informed if its assistance is needed. The Court will gladly give that assistance so that work on the Ganga can be carried out without obstacles. Just as the world is united in its concern for the Ganga, so also the Honourable Supreme Court is supporting us in this work.

There is a tendency to expect immediate results. This is difficult. If I were to hurry up the work, what will happen? My officials say, who will face the CVC? Who will face the CBI if a FIR is lodged? Therefore it is necessary to follow procedure. I therefore instructed them to follow procedure and look for flawless shortcuts. We cannot trifle with the Ganga. Whatever work is done should be sustainable and eternal. Therefore, we seek the boon of time and courage from you.

One thing I can say is that our Prime Minister has given me anything and everything that I need to work for the Ganga. I began to feel that if I were to ask for the moon, it would be brought and given to me. I have never seen this aspect of the Prime Minister's Office. A request just has to be issued and it gets fulfilled. We do not want to do work insubstantial enough to be washed away in the first monsoon. We do not want to do work that will be defeated by the first overflow. We do not want to do work where the drains will break and again flow. As Giridhar Malviyaji was saying, we have determined that the treated and untreated waters will not enter the Ganga. We have also requested the industries to present us with their pollution treatment plans. The state and national pollution control boards have also met. I asked them to tell us how pollution can be prevented from entering the Ganga. The Ministry is ready to give any assistance that is needed but the pollution must be stopped. I have also told them this. When a doctor comes out of the operating theatre and says that of the mother and the child, only one can survive, the family is forced to make a decision as per their emotions. Well my emotions tell me that I can let the babe die, but the mother must be saved. This I am convinced of. I have had a very clear talk with the industries. The Kanpur tanneries and slaughterhouses have extended their full support to making the Ganga pollution free. They have put forward the challenges they are facing and I have directed the state pollution board to pay attention to these challenges and work towards relieving them. So far, The governments of all the five states concerned have extended their support to the Ministry and have entered into the minutes that they will follow all its directions. I say that this unity and this cooperation has been brought about by Ma Ganga and not by us. I am just the face of a massive dedicated effort and many blessings. There was a discussion about making this a public campaign. Our Prime Minister made a very important comment during his first speech in Parliament. He said that development needs to be a peoples' movement. People should not only be the passive beneficiaries of development, but have an active role in bringing it about. It is only then that people think that it is their own vision, their own plan. The most crucial element in making development a people's movement is the Ganga campaign. This is because the Ganga includes people from all walks of life. *Aviralta* and *nirmalta* which I have discussed succinctly here are very vast. And I would take more than a couple of hours to go through the 19 points I wanted to discuss with you which have been determined by the Empowered Steering Committee. These 19 points were then approved in a meeting of the Ganga River Basin Authority attended by the representatives of all the states, and a plan has been created based on them. In these plans, two things emerged. One of those was that of plotting the previous and present courses and status of the Ganga and all its tributaries whether existing or lost using a Geographical Information System. A budget of Rs300 crores has been allocated to this work. This is important because some tributaries are already lost while others are on the verge of being lost. The exact extent of the riverbed of Ganga and its tributaries will be mapped in the next two to three years. Once this has been mapped, we will be able to raise the water table in these areas. We will be able to search for

particular rivers. This exercise will definitely have academic interest, but also economic benefits. This will be a wonderful event when we will be able to understand the exact extent of the Ganga, the Jamuna, when we will know the origin and the course of the Assi and the Varuna. All of India and the world will be able to determine the number of rivers that comprise the Ganga Basin, where they emerge from and what their status is. Our Prime Minister told me that he is the representative of Banaras in the Parliament. The Ministry is not expected to pay special attention to Banaras on that account. He will serve the seat as is expected of his position. However, I told the Prime Minister that some things had been planned even before he contested the elections. That we are compelled to do. One of those is a desire of mine. The Central Water and Power Research Station, in Pune, is a globally-significant institution that conducts research on water and allied topics. It is a wish of mine that Banaras is in the middle of the Ganga's course, and a branch of the CWPRS should be located here. I will speak with the State to donate land for this, it will be a University of rivers, of water. I spoke with the officials there who are true gems.

I don't want to talk politics, but let me tell you what Narendra Modi has given to the country. The country has always had rivers, its land has always been fertile, its people have always been intelligent and brave, the people of this country have always been hardworking, the people have always been sacrificing. The country has everything. The country has diamonds, copper, iron, everything. There was just one thing that was missing and that was self-respect. The people did not believe in their own capability. We needed to look at others for approval. Modi has installed in our minds that 'yes we will, and yes we can.' There are so many wings in our ministry with so many engineers and scientists, but they are tied to their desks. If you open the door to a parrot's cage, for a while it does not realise it can go beyond those confines. You need to encourage it and point out the sky to it. But then it is scared of the crows. You need to encourage it to fly higher than the crows. I will someday write a book about this. When the Prime Minister directed me to plan this Ministry, I was scared. I told him that I have not gone to school- I am the product of home learning- and you have given me a responsibility with science and technology. He said, 'yes, you can and you will. Do it!' This gave me self-confidence. And it is because of this confidence that we can come out of this difficulty. We are not to perform only limited tasks, there is no boundary to the work we can do.

This is the country where the sun's rays first touch the earth. The Sun is the god of intelligence, and so the country is filled with intelligent people. Intelligent people working together can perform many tasks thought impossible. With this assurance I am asking for your blessings. When I saw the saints walking towards me, I thought I have gone back to another era. I am your child who has been entrusted with this task by the Prime Minister. It will take 10-12 years to complete all the work, but things will definitely be in place within three years. Work will take off in the next 45 days. I don't want to give any more details. The media is sitting here. Last time, I was asked about cremations on the banks of the Ganga. I suddenly remembered an incident in Haridwar where some remains had been immersed on the banks of the river, and people were trampling them and bathing forward. So I said that there should be none on the banks. As a result of that, my effigy is being burnt even today. All I meant was that it should not be on the banks, immersion of remains should be in deeper water. But this is not for me to decide, the design of the cremation infrastructure, whether it should be wood-fired or electric and the other details. Shankaracharya is sitting here, and this is a matter for him to decide. Very soon, I will send a letter to the four Shankaracharyas and the akhada leaders asking them to decide these things which are linked to our traditions and cannot be decided by the government. It is only the sages who have a role to play in this decision. I realised from the uproar on my comment about the cremation that this is a matter that can only be decided by the sages. It is wrong for the Ministry to even comment about it. We will accept the recommendations of those who have traditionally established our rituals and make arrangements to implement them. These are very small difficulties, the big ones are those of

aviralta and nirmalta. Modiji's government is working with all its might to satisfy these requirements . I will again say that after Bhagirathi, Modi-ji has been born to work for the Ganga. With these words I do pranaam to all those on the dais and my namaskaars to the audience. I will interact with you often. Say with me, 'Ganga Maiyya ki Jai'.