

Baru's account is baseless and riddled with contradictions. He had no privileged access or inside knowledge, says Congress

Sanjaya Baru admits in his book that he had no privileged access or inside information on the central issue of the book -- the relationship between the Prime Minister and the Congress President.

Baru writes that he has no "**deep knowledge of how the two dealt with each other**" and confesses that, "during my time at the PMO I rarely had the occasion, or indeed the need, to look at Government files, much less confidential files". Barusays "Any such differences between them would have been aired only in their private meetings" -- about which Mr. Baru, of course, had no knowledge.

Mr. Baru fails to explain how exactly he came to know of the "differences" between India's two top-most political figures that he so authoritatively chronicles if he had access neither to their one-on-one interactions nor to government files, and the said differences were not publicly aired.

The publisher describes the book as "packed with political gossip" -- a rare honest statement in the book, because that is what the book actually is -- just a compilation of well-known, and well-worn baseless and planted speculative gossip.

Baru says in his book, with no hint of irony, "Reports appearing in the media about differences between {Dr. Singh and Mrs. Gandhi} were often planted by disgruntled Congressmen and mischievous journalists, some of whom would then point a finger in my direction... ". Given the timing of its publication and its prominence in the news media, his book must qualify as the mother of all plants.

Mr. Baru presents, by his own admission, a very subjective picture drawn from memory, rather than from any documentary sources. Baru writes, "I have combined personal, admittedly subjective, accounts of what I regard as important events, with an analysis, *hopefully objective*, of policies and issues" and adds, "much of what I have written is based on memory...".

It is hardly surprising that Baru's book lacks any hard facts, insights or analysis, or anything new. Mr. Baru had a limited role in the PMO. He was no political insider. "You just write my speeches for me". This is how Baru says Dr. Manmohan Singh told him about his role in the PMO.

These very material confessions about the lack of any objective basis for the book are hidden away in the book, even while it is being falsely touted by Baru and by its publisher as "a great insider account of Indian political life and a superb portrait of the Manmohan Singh era.

On a shaky foundation of planted rumours and gossip, subjective analysis and recollections from personal memory, unsupported by facts or documents, let alone objective analysis, Baru constructs a fantastic, fictional narrative in thin air, full of gigantic, politically motivated sound-bites that falsely suggest that the PM was a rubber stamp, or that the Congress President interfered in affairs of Government.

The book is no more than a cheap stunt to create a nonexistent premise and then weave a false narrative around it. In fact, much of Mr. Baru's book totally negates his claims of differences between the two leaders and is riddled with contradictions and baseless assertions. Some examples.

- Mr. Baru is right when he says, "I had no reason to doubt that Dr. Singh and Sonia implicitly trusted each other." His book does not assert that this relationship of trust changed at any time. Mr. Baru recounts numerous instances of their extraordinary mutual trust and affection.
- This assertion by Mr. Baru that the PM and the Congress President shared a relationship of "implicit trust" (in Baru's words) totally contradicts and completely exposes the falseness of the quite opposite picture of conflict and mistrust he paints in his book.
- Despite such clear admission of excellent relations between Dr. Singh and Mrs. Gandhi, Mr. Baru contradicts himself by citing differences between them that never existed. Without explanation or evidence, he writes that

"the PM's authority was further curbed by the nature of [their] power sharing", that the prime minister was "defanged", and that "with the emasculating of the PM, not just Manmohan Singh himself, but his government and ultimately the country became the losers."

- Mr. Baru claims, without a whit of proof, that "Congress party spokespersons let it be known to all concerned that Sonia Gandhi would be the boss even though she was not the PM, despite her 'renunciation' of power... Credit for all the good work of the government would go to Sonia and blame for all the failures would go to Dr. Singh."
- Mr. Baru claims that the party stopped the prime minister from nominating noted industrialist Anu Agha to the Planning Commission. And yet, elsewhere in the book, he says Agha was nominated to the National Advisory Council (NAC) at the behest of Mrs. Gandhi.
- Baru also claims falsely, without any evidence, that the prime minister's principal secretary, Pulok Chatterjee "had regular, almost daily, meetings with Sonia at which he was said to brief her on the key policy issues of the day and seek her instructions on important files to be cleared by the PM."
- In an extremely shabby example of poor journalism, Mr. Baru's book goes on to claim without proof that the prime minister was overruled in the creation of the NAC and in cabinet appointments, and wasn't given credit for the highly popular MNREGA scheme, the UPA's Lok Sabha win of 2009, and his successful visits to the US.
- Without logic, he also claims, that the party and the "family" prevented PM from settling the Kashmir issue because they wanted CP [Congress president] and RG [Rahul Gandhi] to take credit".
- The book claims that real power in the first coalition government of the Congress party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) lay not with Dr. Singh but with the Congress president. Yet, in the chapter that dwells on the UPA's break-up with the Left parties in 2008, Mr. Baru claims the prime minister disregarded Mrs. Gandhi and the party in unilaterally implementing "a neoliberal agenda".

Perhaps the best evidence of Mr. Baru's lack of integrity is his protestations on one hand of great loyalty and love for the prime minister and, on the other hand, his heaping insult and ridicule on a Prime Minister who is respected and honoured for his strength, competence, accomplishments and virtues not only all over India but globally.

Although this is a charge he makes against the Congress President, actually it is Mr. Baru who has now devalued the office of the Prime Minister and been grossly uncharitable and unfair to honorable people merely because he was passed over for a second term.

The political relationship between the PM and the Congress President is an inspiring example of the great democratic tradition of selfless cooperation of political leaders in the best interests of our nation, established and fostered in the Congress party by Mahatma Gandhi. It is a tradition that all Congress workers and leaders always aspire to emulate. It should also be a lesson to other political parties especially in the current circumstances.

Excerpts:

"It was an early mark of Sonia's regard for and trust in Dr. Singh that when she took charge as the party's leader in the Lok Sabha [in 1999], she nominated Dr. Singh as the party's leader in the Rajya Sabha.

"Sonia would call on Dr. Singh to discuss family matters. There were, after all, few family elders available to give her advice on things that may have bothered her in her personal life... At least on one occasion she came to see Dr. Singh to discuss her concerns about Rahul's personal plans. Following this conversation, Dr. Singh invited Rahul for lunch and the two spent time together.

"[Mrs. Gandhi] felt closer and more familial in her relationship with [Dr. Singh] than with other senior leaders of his generation.

"[Dr. Singh] always made it a point to stand up on the dais when Sonia stood up to walk the podium and deliver her speech. When Sonia turned sixty, Dr. Singh sent her a personal letter praising her courage and fortitude and the energy and wisdom with which she had led the Congress party back to power.

"Sonia and Dr. Singh's warm personal equation was also evident in the little gestures he made to show his concern for her welfare.... I had no reason to doubt that Dr. Singh and Sonia implicitly trusted each other."

Sd/-
(Ajay Maken)