

Does Joe Biden Have Parkinson's Disease? What His Personal Doctor Says

US President Joe Biden's doctor Kevin O'Connor on Thursday defended his "excellent" mental acuity days after his shocking decision not to seek reelection.

Dr Kevin O'Connor was asked by the New York Post about 81-year-old Biden's health.

"It's excellent," he answered. "Could that change before the end of his term?" the NYP journalist followed up as the presidential physician walked on the White House driveway. "I hope not," O'Connor, who has never briefed the press during Biden's more than three years in office, responded.

"And how is his mental cognition?" The Post asked. "It's excellent," Biden's personal doctor said. He was then asked if there was a reason why they didn't perform a cognitive test on Biden.

"We don't need to. He's here every day," O'Connor said. The journalist then asked him, "Is there anything to that speculation that there might be something related to Parkinson's that he has?"

"No, he's good," O'Connor answered.

Parkinson's was linked with Joe Biden after reports claimed that an expert on the disease visited the White House eight times in eight months, including at least once for a meeting with Biden's physician. The White House, however, earlier this month said that it was being incorrectly assumed and insinuated that Biden was being treated for Parkinson's.

Joe Biden bowed out of the White House on Sunday after weeks of pressure that began with a disastrous June 27 debate performance against Republican candidate Donald Trump that raised concerns about his age and mental acuity.

His exit made him the first president in US history to pull out so late in an election race, and the first to bow out because of concerns over his mental acuity and health.

He has now thrown his support behind his deputy Kamala Harris, who is the first woman in US history to hold the vice presidency. She is set to be nominated at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on August 19.

Mexican Drug Lord 'El Mayo' And El Chapo's Son Arrested In US

Mexican drug lord Ismael 'El Mayo' Zambada and the son of his former partner, Joaquin 'El Chapo' Guzman, were arrested in El Paso, Texas, on Thursday, the U.S. Justice Department said.

"The Justice Department has taken into custody two additional alleged leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel, one of the most violent and powerful drug trafficking organizations in the world," the department said in a statement. Zambada and Joaquin Guzman Lopez, the son of El Chapo, face multiple charges in the U.S. "for heading the Cartel's criminal operations, including its deadly fentanyl manufacturing and trafficking networks," the statement said.

The arrest of Guzman Lopez was first reported by Reuters, ahead of the Justice Department statement. Two U.S. officials told Reuters that Zambada and Guzman Lopez were detained after landing in a private plane.

Zambada is one of the most consequential traffickers in Mexico's history and co-founded the Sinaloa Cartel with El Chapo, who was extradited to the United States in 2017 and is serving a life sentence in a maximum security prison.

After El Chapo's extradition, his criminal empire was inherited by four of his sons - known as Los Chapitos, or Little Chapos - who took over his faction of the cartel and became some of the biggest exporters of fentanyl to the United States. El Mayo and Los Chapitos have had a fractious relationship since El Chapo's extradition, and the arrests of the two traffickers may trigger instability or even violence in Mexico. U.S. federal prosecutors in February charged Zambada with conspiracy to manufacture and distribute fentanyl, which the Drug Enforcement Administration says is the leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 18 and 45.

"Will Not Be Silent" On Gaza, Says Kamala Harris After Netanyahu Meeting



WASHINGTON: Kamala Harris signaled a major shift on US Gaza policy Thursday, with the presidential hopeful telling Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to seal a peace deal and insisting she would not be "silent" on the suffering in the Palestinian enclave.

Ripping up outgoing President Joe Biden's playbook of mostly behind-the-scenes pressure on Israel, the vice president said after meeting Netanyahu that it was time to end the "devastating" war.

"What has happened in Gaza over the past nine months is devastating. The images of dead children and desperate hungry people fleeing for safety, sometimes displaced for the second, third or fourth time," Harris told reporters.

"We cannot look away in the face of these tragedies. We cannot allow ourselves to become numb to the suffering and I will not be silent."

The 59-year-old - now the presumptive Democratic

presidential nominee after Biden said at the weekend he would not stand in November's election - said she pressed Netanyahu on the dire situation in the "frank" meeting.

She said she "expressed with the prime minister my serious concern about the scale of human suffering and Gaza, including the death of far too many innocent civilians." "And I made clear my serious concern about the dire humanitarian situation there."

"Get this deal done" - Harris also called for the establishment of a Palestinian state and went on to call on both him and Hamas to agree to a ceasefire and hostage release deal to end the war sparked by Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel.

"As I just told Prime Minister Netanyahu, it is time to get this deal done," she said.

Harris's outspoken comments were a stark contrast to the largely amiable greetings between Biden and

Netanyahu earlier in the day, even if it masked months of tensions between the two men as well as questions over the US president's relevance.

"From a proud Zionist Jew to a proud Zionist Irish American, I want to thank you for 50 years of public service and 50 years of support for the State of Israel," Netanyahu said in tribute to Biden at the start of the Oval Office meeting.

"And I look forward to discussing with you today and working with you in the months ahead."

Harris has been more outspoken on Gaza in the past than Biden and there had been speculation that she could adopt a tougher approach on Israel. Officials earlier denied there is any "daylight" between her and Biden.

The White House said Biden would tell Netanyahu there needed to be a "compromise" for a deal, after the Israeli premier gave a fiery speech to the US Congress on Wednesday in which he vowed "total victory" against Hamas.

"The president will be reaffirming for Prime Minister Netanyahu that he believes we need to get there, and we need to get there soon," spokesman John Kirby told reporters.

"More optimistic" - Biden and Netanyahu later met the families of US hostages held in Gaza, who said they hoped for a possible new ceasefire proposal in coming days.

Biden Committed To Attending QUAD Summit In India: White House

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden is still committed to attending the annual leadership summit of the QUAD countries which is scheduled to be held in India this year, the White House said on Thursday.

"We're still committed to there being a Quad leader summit this year, but there's nothing on the calendar right now for it," White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby told reporters at a news conference here.

QUAD, comprising Australia, Japan, India and the US, is an initiative of Biden. In the first 100 days of his presidency, he convened a virtual leadership summit of the QUAD countries in 2020. Since then QUAD leaders have been holding an annual summit on a rotation basis. India is scheduled to host the QUAD leadership summit this year.

Kirby said now that Biden is not running for reelection, certainly, one can expect there will be opportunities on the calendar that may not have been before. "So we're all exploring what those opportunities can look like in terms of advancing his foreign policy agenda and national security opportunities here and around the world. But I don't have anything on the schedule to speak to now, but I mean, stay tuned," he said. "I think there'll be some opportunities that the president is going to want to explore."

Sri Lanka's First Presidential Vote Since Unrest To Be Held On September 21

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's first presidential elections since an unprecedented economic crisis spurred widespread unrest will be held in September, the election commission said Friday.

The election will be the first test of the public mood since the height of the 2022 downturn, which caused months of food, fuel and medicine shortages across the island nation.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe, 75, who took office after street protests forced his predecessor to flee the country, has strongly hinted he plans to run.

He will face at least two rivals campaigning against austerity measures his government imposed to satisfy an International Monetary Fund bailout package.

The five-week campaign announced by the commission will conclude with a September 21 vote in a country still struggling with a fragile economic recovery and endemic discontent over cost of living issues.

Economic issues are expected to dominate the campaign as the country emerges from its worst-ever recession in 2022, when the GDP shrank by a record 7.8 percent. Inflation has since returned to normal levels from its peak of 70 percent at the height of the crisis.

Wickremesinghe has also successfully negotiated a restructure of Sri Lanka's \$46 billion foreign debt with



bilateral lenders including China, following a 2022 government default.

But his policies to balance the government's books by hiking taxes and withdrawing generous utility subsidies have been deeply unpopular with the public.

While the months-long food, fuel and medicine shortages seen at the peak of the economic crisis are now a distant memory, many Sri Lankans say Wickremesinghe's austerity measures have left them struggling to make ends meet.

Opposition parties have vowed to renegotiate terms of the \$2.9 billion IMF bailout Wickremesinghe negotiated last year.

The president's main challenger so far is Sajith Premadasa, 57, a one-time party ally and current opposition leader.

Premadasa has vowed to continue with economic reforms and the IMF programme but pledged to cushion the public by reducing the tax increases

Wickremesinghe imposed to shore up state revenue.

A leftist party is also fielding its leader, 55-year-old former agriculture minister Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who is campaigning against plans to privatise state companies.

Wickremesinghe took office following the government default in 2022, after a huge crowd stormed predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa's compound.

Rajapaksa, who was accused of steering Sri Lanka into the crisis through economic mismanagement, temporarily fled abroad and issued his resignation from Singapore.

Local elections were due to be held last year but postponed indefinitely after the government insisted it had no money to conduct a nationwide vote.

More than 17 million Sri Lankans over the age of 18 are eligible to cast a ballot.

The election commission has allocated \$33 million (10 billion rupees) for this year's presidential poll.

JD Vance's "Childless Cat Ladies" Jab At Kamala Harris Sparks Uproar

WASHINGTON: US Republican vice presidential nominee JD Vance is learning the hard way the internet doesn't just love cats but also childless cat ladies, as comments resurfaced in which he claimed those without offspring were less fit to govern.

In a 2021 clip, Vance singled out Kamala Harris, now the Democratic presidential nominee, among others as he told Fox News that those who hadn't procreated, particularly "childless cat ladies," were "miserable" and had no "direct stake" in the country.

The comments have sparked a storm of scorn and accusations that the father of three represents an out-of-touch, sexist Republican mindset that has no place in the modern era.

"It would be funny if it wasn't so sad," Minnesota Governor Tim Walz told MSNBC, adding: "My God, they went after 'cat people,' good luck with that!"

If Harris, who has two stepchildren, beats Republican former president Donald Trump in



November elections, she not only becomes the first woman president, but also the first woman of Black and Asian heritage, which has opened her up to a number of attacks along demographic lines.

While multiple Republicans have flagged her lack of biological children as an issue, her online "KHive" of fans has been running defense - via memes, indignation and supportive posts including from celebrities, politicians and members of her own family.

An outraged Jennifer Aniston pointed to her own infertility, which the actor has been vocal about in the past, while comedian and talk show host Whoopi Goldberg asked "Now, what the hell?" "Just a basic fact"

that same year, told CNN the comments were hurtful given an adoption setback he was facing at the time.

"He couldn't have known that, but maybe that's why you shouldn't be talking about other people's children," Buttigieg said.

Harris has two stepchildren, Cole and Ella, through her husband Doug Emhoff and his first wife.

Their mother, Kerstin Emhoff, said in a statement to CNN that the attacks on Harris were "baseless."

"For over 10 years, since Cole and Ella were teenagers, Kamala has been a co-parent with Doug and I," she said. "I love our blended family and am grateful to have her in it."

Ella, age 25, who refers to Harris as "Momala," meanwhile wrote on Instagram that "I love my three parents."

"How can you be 'childless' when you have cutie pie kids like cole and I." "Leaders should have children"

Harris supporters were quick to point out that no US president has ever physically given birth, since all have been men.

OpenAI Announces Search GPT To Challenge Google

SAN FRANCISCO: OpenAI on Thursday said it was putting its artificial intelligence engine to work in a challenge to Google's market-dominating search engine.

The startup behind ChatGPT announced that it is testing a "SearchGPT" prototype that is "designed to combine the strength of our AI models with information from the web" to answer online queries quickly and to provide relevant sources. SearchGPT is being made available to a small group of users and publishers to get feedback, OpenAI said in a blog post.

Search features refined in the prototype will be woven into ChatGPT in the future, according to the San Francisco-based company. Users will be able to interact with SearchGPT through conversational queries, and can ask follow-up questions as they might if speaking to a person, OpenAI said.

Google recently added AI-generated query result summaries - referred to as "Overviews" - to its search engine, causing worries among some that the move would result in fewer opportunities to serve up money-making ads.

This new feature offers

written text at the top of results for Google searches, ahead of the traditional links to sites, which summarizes information that the engine believes answers the user's search query. OpenAI's description of SearchGPT sounded similar to Google's Overviews. Since the release of ChatGPT at the end of 2022, companies in the sector have been engaged in a frantic race to deploy generative AI programs for producing text, images and other content through prompts in everyday language. "We are innovating at every layer of the AI stack," Google chief Sundar Pichai said this week during an earnings call for parent company Alphabet, which he also heads. OpenAI said it was working with some publishers to refine SearchGPT, which is being kept separate from the training of its generative AI foundation models.

"AI search is going to become one of the key ways that people navigate the internet, and it's crucial, in these early days, that the technology is built in a way that values, respects, and protects journalism and publishers," The Atlantic chief executive Nicholas Thompson said in the OpenAI blog post.

"I Pray Your Daughter Is...": Jennifer Aniston Slams Trump's Running Mate



An old comment by Donald Trump's running mate JD Vance - suggesting childless women are less fit to govern - has sparked a volley of criticism, the latest snap coming from actor Jennifer Aniston.

Vance had singled out Kamala Harris, now the Democratic Presidential nominee, among others during a 2021 interview and said those without offspring, especially "childless cat ladies", had no "direct stake" in the country.

Speaking to Tucker Carlson on Fox News, he had said the US was being run by "a bunch of childless cat ladies who are miserable at their own lives and the choices that they've made and so they want to make the rest of the country miserable, too."

"It's just a basic fact. You look at Kamala Harris, Pete Buttigieg, AOC, the entire future of the Democrats is

daughter is fortunate enough to bear children of her own one day. I hope she will not need to turn to IVF as a second option. Because you are trying to take that away from her, too," Ms Aniston wrote in her post. Kamala Harris's lack of biological children has been regarded as an issue by the Republicans, but she has received support from politicians, celebrities, and from her own family. Her supporters also pointed out that no US president has ever physically given birth, since all have been men.

Kerstin Emhoff, the mother of Harris' stepchildren, has slammed the attacks on the Vice President as "baseless" in a statement to CNN.

"For over 10 years, since Cole and Ella were teenagers, Kamala has been a co-parent with Doug and I. I love our blended family and am grateful to have her in it," she said. "I love my three parents. How can you be 'childless' when you have cutie pie kids like cole and I," wrote Ella, 25, on Instagram.

"It would be funny if it wasn't so sad. My God, they went after 'cat people,' good luck with that," Minnesota Governor Tim Walz told MSNBC.

"Now, what the hell?" asked talk show host Whoopi Goldberg.

After 55 Years, One Of Australia's Biggest Maritime Mysteries Has Been Solved

55 years after it sank, killing 21 men, Australian scientists have finally located the shipwreck of the MV Noongah. According to the BBC, the huge freighter was carrying steel off the coast of New South Wales when it sank in rough seas in 1969, killing 21 of the 26 crew members on board. The incident sparked one of the biggest maritime searches in Australian history but the remains of 20 of the dead were never recovered. Now, MV Noongah has finally been found more than a half-century after it was lost at sea, Australian scientists announced on Thursday.

The location of the wreck was confirmed by Australia's science agency CSIRO, using high-resolution seafloor mapping and video footage. As per a press release, one of the agency's research vessels investigated the wreck in June and determined that, after almost 55 years, the ship was largely intact and situated in an upright position at the bottom of the ocean, roughly 550 feet below the surface. A dive team then explored the wreck up close to confirm its identity.

The Sydney Project - which finds and documents the wrecks of lost ships - is now planning a dive to collect addi-



tional vision from the site, in the hope of shedding light on why the ship sank.

"This tragedy is still very much in the memory of many in the community," CSIRO's Matt Kimber said, per the BBC. "We hope that knowing the resting place of the vessel brings some closure for all," he added.

For 55 years, the researchers struggled to find MV Noongah. On the day the ship went down, its crew tried for hours to keep the vessel afloat before eventually abandoning it about 30 minutes before the ship sank completely. The radio operator sent out a distress signal around then, which prompted one of the largest search and rescue operations ever carried out in Australia.

Over the next 12 hours, officials found two men at sea in two separate life rafts, and three more clinging to a plank of wood. However, the fate of

the rest of the crew and the ship itself has been a mystery ever since.

Notably, locals had spotted the shipwreck years ago in the water off the coast of South West Rocks, about 460 kilometres north of Sydney. However, the lack of technology or diving knowledge needed to identify the wreck stopped the endeavour.

Now, a half-century after the incident, the CSIRO located the location of the shipwreck. Samir Alhafith, who was part of the mission to find the wreck, said in a statement that knowing the ship's location may provide opportunities to answer some of those questions.

"Not only is the discovery of these significant wrecks important for the surviving sailors and families of those that perished during the tragedy but also it allows us to investigate the mystery behind the sinking," Mr Alhafith said.

Climate Change Intensifies Rainfall Patterns, Typhoons, Warn Scientists

SINGAPORE: Climate change is driving changes in rainfall patterns across the world, scientists said in a paper published on Friday, which could also be intensifying typhoons and other tropical storms.

Taiwan, the Philippines and then China were lashed by the year's most powerful typhoon this week, with schools, businesses and financial markets shut as wind speeds surged up to 227 kph (141 mph). On China's eastern coast, hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated ahead of landfall on Thursday.

Stronger tropical storms are part of a wider phenomenon of weather extremes driven by higher temperatures, scientists say.

Researchers led by Zhang Wenxia at the China Academy of Sciences studied historical meteorological data and found about 75% of the world's land area had seen a rise in "precipitation variability" or wider swings between wet and dry weather.

Warmer temperatures have enhanced the ability of the atmosphere to hold moisture, which is causing wider fluctuations in rainfall, the researchers said in a paper published by the Science journal. "(Variability) has increased in most places, including Australia, which means rainier rain periods and drier dry periods," said Steven

Sherwood, a scientist at the Climate Change Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, who was not involved in the study.

"This is going to increase as global warming continues, enhancing the chances of droughts and/or floods."

FEWER, BUT MORE INTENSE, STORMS

Scientists believe that climate change is also reshaping the behaviour of tropical storms, including typhoons, making them less frequent but more powerful.

"I believe higher water vapour in the atmosphere is the ultimate cause of all of these tendencies toward more extreme hydrologic phenomena," Sherwood told Reuters.

Typhoon Gaemi, which first made landfall in Taiwan on Wednesday, was the strongest to hit the island in eight years.

While it is difficult to attribute individual weather events to climate change, models predict that global warming makes typhoons stronger, said Sachie Kanada, a researcher at Japan's Nagoya University.

"In general, warmer sea surface temperature is a favourable condition for tropical cyclone development," she said. In its "blue paper" on climate change published this month, China said the number of typhoons in the Northwest Pacific and South China Sea had declined significantly since the 1990s, but they were