NEW DELHI: India’s excitables news channels went into overdrive yesterday on news beleaguered opposition leader Rahul Gandhi had returned from a two-month break from politics after a series of embarrassing electoral defeats. Television footage showed a convoy of black SUVs driving to Rahul’s house in the exclusive leafy heart of New Delhi, purportedly carrying the scion of the Gandhi family dynasty. Reporters set up camp outside the house to try to catch a glimpse of the 44-year-old, while RahulReturns was trending on Twitter.

CNN-IBN reported Gandhi, whose father, grandmother and great-grandfather were all prime ministers, returned from a sojourn in Myanmar where he was staying at a “famous meditation retreat”. Gandhi’s decision in February to go on a sabbatical on the same day that India’s budget session of parliament started sparked widespread criticism as well as speculation about his future. According to Congress Party officials, Gandhi took a break to “reflect” on the future course of the party which has suffered a string of defeats since its humiliating loss in last year’s national polls. Gandhi has been heavily criticized for his lackluster leadership as number two in Congress.

But the leader has dismissed speculation that he would quit politics altogether or take over from his mother as Congress president. Veteran Congress leader Madhusudan Mistry said Gandhi would address a rally of Congress president. Veteran Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had returned from a two-month break from politics after a series of embarrassing electoral defeats. Television footage showed a convoy of black SUVs driving to Rahul’s house in the exclusive leafy heart of New Delhi, purportedly carrying the scion of the Gandhi family dynasty. Reporters set up camp outside the house to try to catch a glimpse of the 44-year-old, while RahulReturns was trending on Twitter.

NEW DELHI: An Indian Muslim eats a meat dish at a wayside shop, in New Delhi, India. — AP

NEW DELHI: India’s die-hard Hindus push to ban beef in blow to poor Muslims’ welfare organizations ran “gaushalas,” or cow shelters, in many cities where abandoned cows found wandering the streets are given food and shelter. Feeding a cow is seen by many Hindus as a way to appease the gods and get one’s wishes fulfilled. “Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna,” chanted Minu Aggarwal, a housewife, as she fed soaked lentils and leafy greens to a cow at a New Delhi shelter. The chant means “Lord Krishna,” a popular Hindu god. As she bent down in obeisance near the animal, a shelter worker touched her head with the cow’s tail— a blessing, Aggarwal said.

“Cow is our mother”
Pankaj Bansal, a New Delhi businessman feeding pieces of bread to a cow nearby, praised the bans. “The cow is our mother,” he said. “The ban should be imposed all over the country.” In recent decades, as millions of Indians traveled abroad for study and work, tastes have slowly changed. Today, many restaurants and small eateries serve steak and kebabs made from buffalo meat. Many people who in the past would not have eaten the meat at home in deference to strictly vegetarian parents and older relatives now openly broil buffalo meat. Economists say a complete ban on cow slaughter could prove counterproductive as farmers would abandon their animals once they stop giving milk. Worse, farmers may consider it economically impossible to keep cows altogether if they must feed the animals for the rest of their lives, said Harish Damodaran, an economic analyst. —AP