Tiny Australia bird stalls divisive coal mine project

May 3 2019

Students hold up placards during an environmental protest in Melbourne on May 3, 2019

A tiny finch flew into the centre of Australia's bitter environmental politics Friday when local authorities blocked the construction of a

contentious coal mine until the rare bird is protected.

The Indian-backed Adani mine in the northeast of the country has become a lightning rod for criticism of the conservative government's lack of environmental policies ahead of a May 18 election.

After months of argument, authorities in Queensland said on Friday that Adani's Carmichael project would be blocked until provisions are made to protect the endangered black-throated finch.

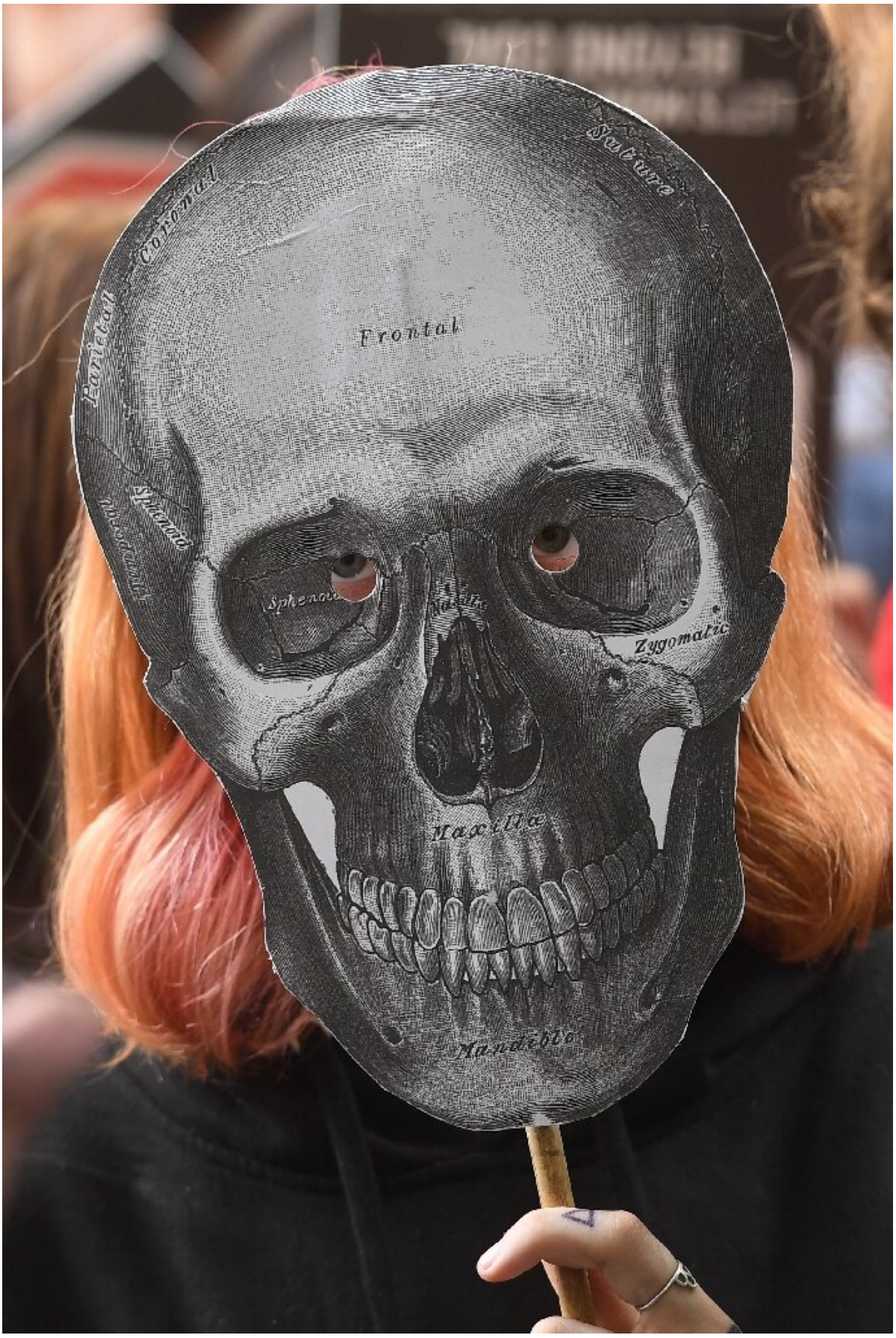
While the project has the support of locals hoping it will boost jobs in a state suffering from a mining downturn, it is fiercely opposed by voters elsewhere in the country.

The mine would increase Australia's coal exports at a time when many believe the country should be doing more to tackle climate change.

The project is also seen as a gateway—opening the door to tap further deposits in the vast Galilee Basin, boosting transport links and making the argument against further development more difficult.

After years of delay, the conservative federal government approved the mine last month, leaving final go-ahead to the opposition-led Labor state government.

But on Friday the Queensland government halted the project on conservation grounds, saying Adani's black-throated finch management plan did not meet environmental requirements.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A schoolgirl holds up a death mask during a climate protest in Melbourne

'Not going away'-

Queensland's department of environment said the proposed mine site represented the largest population of the tiny endangered bird, and Adani needed to "gather more accurate information" and resubmit a plan for assessment.

The coal miner fired back calling on the state's premier to "show leadership", "take charge" and "once and for all" commit to finalising environmental plans.

"We are not going away and we will see this through for the benefit of Queensland and in particular for the people in regional Queensland," Adani Mining CEO Lucas Dow said in a statement.

The federal government's National party coalition partner has backed the project in a rural area of marginal seats that are considered likely to decide this month's election.

The Labor party has sat on the fence, caught between union allies who support the mine and fear of alienating urban voters concerned about climate change.

The mine's setback came as hundreds of Australian students skipped school Friday to protest against government inaction on climate change.

Students targeting politicians during the election campaign held protests

across the country carrying placards saying "Stop Adani".

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