

People expressed discontents and opposed TEMPL company in gram Sabha for Pacheri manganese and iron ore mines

Barbil(KCN): It has been 15 years since, The Scheduled Tribes

parliament to address 'historical injustice' done to the forest

habitat. However, even after a decade, the law remains to be

exploiting these innocent habitants of the area. yesterday's incident has witnessed the truth. The Triveni Earth Movers limited has attempted to conduct village meeting (Gram sabha) ignoring people for its Pacheri Lasarda Manganese and Iron ore mines under Joda Mining zone in Keonjhar district for the conversion of forest land to non forest land to extends its mining activities. The locals expressed their discontents saying the meeting was

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and other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 popularly known as Forest Rights Act, was enacted by the

dwelling scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers by not recognizing their rights on ancestral lands and their

implemented with much more transparency. Taking the advantages of the ignorance of these tribals, many corporate houses are

BSP chief Mayawati will not contest UP polls, says party leader SC Misra

LUCKNOW(KCN): Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati will not contest the

polls and help party candidates win, he said.

alone. It has entered into an alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab.

Over poll surveys claiming that the BSP is already "out of the race" for power in Uttar Pradesh, Misra claimed his party will form government in the state and Mayawati will take over as chief minister for the fifth time. Mayawati had served as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1995, 1997, 2002 and 2007. She was a member of the legislative council in 2007.

The BSP is trying to revive its 2007 winning formula of Dalits-Brahmins combination in the state.

As part of their this

time-tested social engineering, Misra has been crisscrossing Uttar Pradesh to promote "bhaichara" (brotherhood) among the Dalits and Brahmins. Addressing a 'Brahmins sammelan' in Lucknow last year, Mayawati had said her party would work for the development of Uttar Pradesh and improve its law and order if voted to power in the Assembly elections. Though neither the BJP nor the Samajwadi Party talking much against the BSP during their campaign, the Mayawati-led party, with a strong support base among Dalits in the state, has the potential of upsetting their apple carts.



upcoming Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, party general secretary S C Misra said here on Tuesday. Misra said he will also not contest the state elections, which will be held in seven phases starting February 10.

Since elections are being held in five states, including Punjab, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh, the BSP president

Later, he told PTI, "The decision of the party for now is that Mayawati ji and I will not fight Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. However, future decisions will be taken by Mayawati ji herself."

Mayawati is neither a legislator nor an MP. Misra is a Rajya Sabha member. The BSP has decided to contest all 403 seats in Uttar Pradesh

South Africa Parliament fire suspect charged with terrorism

CAPE TOWN (KCN): A man suspected of starting a fire that gutted South Africa's parliament



made a second court appearance on Tuesday to face a new charge of terrorism, in addition to robbery and arson accusations.

Zandile Christmas Mafe, 49, was arrested around the parliament complex in

CBDT extends date for filing Tax Audit reports and ITRs

Kolkata (KCN): Today, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has notified the extension of the timeline for filing ITR and Various reports of audit for the AY 2021-22. On consideration of difficulties reported by the taxpayers and other stakeholders due to COVID and in electronic filing of various reports of audit under the provisions of the Income-tax Act, 1961, the CBDT, in exercise of its powers under Section 119, has extended the due date of furnishing of Report of Audit under any provision of the Act for the Previous Year 2020-21 (asst year 2021-22), which was 15th January 2022 has been further extended to 15th February, 2022. Narayan Jain, Chairman, DTPA Representation Committee and KK Jain, President DTPA have welcomed the decision of the CBDT.

The due date of furnishing of Return of Income for the

Assessment Year 2021-22, which was 15th February 2022, has been further extended to 15th March, 2022. The due date of furnishing of Return of Income for the Assessment Year 2021-22, in case of International Transfer Pricing which was 28th February 2022 has been further extended to 15th March, 2022.

This extension shall not apply to Explanation 1 to section 234A, in cases where the amount of tax on the total income as reduced by the amount as specified in clauses (i) to (vi) of sub-section (1) exceeds Rs.1 Lakh. In case of an individual resident in India referred to in section 207 (2), the tax paid by him under section 140A within the due date (without extension under Circular No.9/2021, Circular No.17/2021 and Circular dated 11/1/2022), shall be deemed to be the advance tax.

Mihir Das No More

Bhubaneswar(KCN): Veteran Cine Actor on 9 December 2021 and was on ventilator



Mihir Das died at a hospital in Cuttack on Tuesday, his family said, adding he was 63.

Mr. Das was suffering from renal ailments for years, and he was admitted to the private hospital

support. Born in Mayurbhanj district on 11 February, 1959, he made his debut in art film 'School Master', and first acted in a commercial movie in 'Mathura Bijay' in 1979.

The versatile actor had won the Odisha Government's 'Best Actor' award for his performance in 'Laxmi Pratima' (1998), and 'Pheria Mo Suna Bhauni' (2005). Mr. Das had won the best comedian award for his role in 'Mu Tate Love Karuchhi' (2007). His acting in 'Pua Mora Bholashankara' will always be remembered, his co-worker Babu Lenka said. He was a popular anchor for hosting reality show 'Ashara Aloka'.

Mr. Das had also tried his luck in politics. In 2014, he had joined the Governing Biju Janata Dal, but quit the party and later joined the BJP in 2019. Odisha Governor

Ganeshi Lal, Governor Andhra Pradesh Biswa Bhusan Harichandan, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, OPCC President Niranjan Patnaik, BJP State President, Samir Mohanty and people from different walks of life condoled the popular actor's death. "Saddened over the demise of veteran actor Mihir Das. His indelible footprints in Odisha's art world will remain alive. It's an irreparable loss for the Odia cine world. My thoughts and prayers are with the bereaved family," Mr. Patnaik tweeted. The cremation of Mr. Das will be held with State Honor, CM declared.

Panchayat Poll Schedule Announced

Bhubaneswar(KCN): State Election Commission (SEC) today

phases on February 16, 18, 20, 22 and 24. The voters will exer-

Panchayat Samiti Chairperson and Zilla Parishad Chairperson

January 13. Candidates can file their nominations between January 17 to 21 while scrutiny of the papers will be done on January 22 and the list of validly nominated candidates will be out on January 23 by 3 PM. The last date for withdrawal of nominations is January 25. The final list of candidates will be notified on January 25. Though January 22 and 23 are Government holidays the office of Election Officer shall remain open for scrutiny of nomination and public

CONTINUED ON: P-7



announced the schedule for much-talked three-tier Panchayat Polls.

Addressing a press conference here, State Election Commissioner Aditya Prasad Padhi said the Panchayat elections will be held in five

phases from 7 AM to 1 PM on these days.

Counting of votes and declaration of results will be done at Block level on February 26, 27 and 28, said Mr. Padhi.

The in-direct election for Naib Sarpanch,

will be held on March 11, 12 and 13, respectively.

As per announced schedule, the Election Officer will issue formal notification for the election to various positions in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) on

Amid tensions with China, Taiwan starts rescue operation for missing F-16 fighter

TAIPEI(KCN): Taiwan's air force said it had launched a rescue operation to locate one of its most advanced F-16s after the fighter jet vanished from radar screens on Tuesday.

The jet disappeared around half an hour after taking off for a routine training flight from a base in the southern city of Chiayi, the air force said in a statement. Taiwan's national rescue centre reported that people saw the F-16V "crashing into the sea," adding that two choppers and one coastguard vessel had been dispatched to find the jet. President Tsai Ingwen has ordered an all-out rescue effort and asked for clarity around the cause of the incident, her office said. Taipei commissioned

its first squadron of US-made F-16V fighters in November in an effort to upgrade its ageing fleet as tensions with China continue to



heighten. Beijing claims the self-ruled island as part of its territory and has vowed to take it one day, by force if necessary.

The F-16V is an upgraded and much more sophisticated version of the island's other F-16 fighters which date back

CONTINUED ON: P-7

Irregularities in Recruitment Process of Bank Mitra in Bangida GP

Khordha (KCN): It was held that recruit-



ment to public service must command public confidence. The constitutional values which undergird Articles - 14 and 16 mandate that selection process conducted by public authorities to make recruitment have to be fair, transparent and accountable. All too after human fallibility and foibles intrude into the selection pro-

cess. Bebina Behera, D/O-Kanhu Charan asked to appear in the said interview but the authority concerned not allowed Bebina Behera to participate in the said interview dated-20.12.2021 held at Rajeeb Gandhi Seva Kendra of Bangida GP and violating the norm's of notice and guidelines dated-31.07.2021 and only to accept the application of One Smt. Sujata Sahoo, W/O-Panchanan Sahoo, Village -Haldipada under Nalipada Arjunpur GP. After the due date even if she did not belongs to concerned GP and selected her. Bebina Behera made serious allegation against officials. She claimed that there were many irregularities in the appointment process of Bank Mitra. She alleging that mal-practice in the appointment of Bank Mitra in Bangida GP going against all norm's and filed a writ petition before

the Odisha High Court WP(C)No-40965 of 2021 against Panchayat Raj Secretary Government of Odisha, Collector Khordha, BDO, Khordha, Sarapancha Bangida GP, Binodini Behera President Bangida GP and Sujata Sahoo, W/O-Panchanan Sahoo, Village -Haldipada and prayed to issue an direction to conduct a fresh interview to allowing her to participate in the same and declaring the order of appointment letter of Sujata Sahoo null and avoid. After carefully consideration of writ petition filled by Bebina Behera Honourable High Court of Odisha direction that the Collector Khordha pass an appropriate order in accordance with law within a period of three months from the date of production of certified copy of the order.

COVID-19 vaccine: Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation's camps to reach out to teenagers in slums

BHUBANESWAR(KCN): The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) has started organising special camps to reach out to teenagers

no 41 and Mahisakhala slum in ward no 56. The civic body engaged vaccination teams and slum management committee members

was also organised for adolescents at MBS School near Exhibition ground in Unit-III. Additional District Urban Public Health



in slums and speed up the ongoing inoculation drive in the city for 15 to below 18 years age group. The civic body organised four such camps on Friday. The camps were organised for the teenagers at Santipali slum in ward no 34, Falikia slum in ward

for smooth vaccination of the teens at these camps. Sources said, the BMC decided to carry out the drive in slums to ensure that those unable to register do not face any difficulties in getting vaccinated. Apart from slums, a special camp for teenagers

Officer (ADUPHO) Antaryami Mishra said they have targeted to vaccinate at least 50 teenagers in such camps, though provision for inoculation of 100 beneficiaries has been made. While the morning slot of these camps is kept reserved for teens who are being

Loaded wagon of goods train overturned at Barbil railway siding, track and coach maintenance negligence suspected



Barbie (KCN): Two wagons of goods train suddenly derailed in the railway siding of Badbil, Kendujhar district of Odisha. As per source the train was loaded with iron ore of JSW and derailed while going to its destination after

getting loaded from Barbil railway siding According to the information received, due to the sudden break of the lock connecting the coach, the wagon came down the track and overturned. Intellectuals believe

that the lack of cleanliness of the railway track and negligence in the routine maintenance of railway coaches, such incidents happen frequently. Had there been a passenger train instead of a goods

train, there would have been casualties and the accident could have taken a serious turn, intellectual comments. The railway department needs to pay attention to this matter.

NIT Rourkela closed for 2 days

ROURKELA(KCN): Facing a cluster outbreak of Covid-19 on campus, the National Institute of Technology-Rourkela (NIT-R) on Monday issued

Issuing the circular, NIT-R registrar Prof PK Das said during the period of closure, employees should preferably work from home. Those faculty

stay at their own risk. Positive cases surge U m e r k o t e / Bhawanipatna: The surge in Covid cases in Nabarangpur has put the district ad-

department seeking appointment of adequate medical officers and staff. On Monday, Nabarangpur reported 85 new cases.



order for closure of the institution on January 12 and 13. The effective closure period including holidays would be from January 12 to 16. Till Sunday evening, the institute reported 174 positive cases including 87 students and as many employees and their family members.

members facing difficulty in taking online classes or executing research work of emergent nature can only access the academic area. The circular asked students to vacate their hostel rooms in a week. However, boarders wishing to pursue academic/research activities can

ministration on its toes. In the last one week, the district has reported 285 Covid cases. In view of the situation, it has been decided to make Covid care centres and the dedicated Covid hospital operational by January 12. Collector Kamal Lochan Mishra has written to the Health

Similarly, 86 new positive cases were reported from different blocks of Kalahandi on the day. Currently, the district has 256 active cases. Following the spike in cases, police have intensified enforcement drives in Bhawanipatna, Kesinga and Junagarh.

Lavanya Bags Gold

Bhubaneswar(KCN): J. Lavanya, a student of BSc Microbiology won a gold medal in health and social care in India Skills 2021 organized by the National Skill Development Corporation. She has acknowledged her success as the mentor and state of art infrastructure facility of the School of Paramedics.

Similarly, being trained in the best CNC machines under supervision of a qualified mentor, Satya Ranjan Mohanty won a gold medal in CNC Turning.

Centurion University were awarded for their commendable performance. The students will now compete for the World Skill Competition in Shanghai in 2022.

and 3D Digital Game Art. Centurion University which mainly focuses on skill integrated higher education has always encouraged the students and given all types of facilities to showcase their talents to the world level. The award ceremony function was organized by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in New Delhi from 7-9 January 2022.



A state of art infrastructure of wood works with best-in-class trainers led Hritik Pata to bag a

performance. Odisha topped with 51 medals at the India Skills 2021 organized by the National Skill Development Corporation. In the biggest showcase of skills excellence three students of

tition in Shanghai in 2022. The Centurion University students have competed in different areas like Health and Social Care, CNC Turning, Joinery, Cyber Security, Cloud Computing

In this mega event Odisha won 10 gold, 18 silver, nine bronze medals and 14 medallions of excellence in the country's biggest skill competition of excellence that concluded on Sunday.

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'Shakeela' trailer falls flat, lacks the punch expected in a star biopic



The trailer of Indrajit Lankesh's Hindi language film "Shakeela" doesn't hold much to impress. From using modern-day Hindi music to cliched film sets, it feels like a repackaging of Vidya Balan's 'Dirty Picture' except that this version fails to bring the charm Vidya brought to the

screen. The film, as described by the filmmakers of 'Shakeela', is "inspired by life events of a famous star Shakeela who predominantly starred in southern cinema." It features Richa Chadha as the titular adult actor who was one of the biggest stars of the 1990s ar-

iving from Kerala who went on to act in several adult films in languages spanning Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada, while Pankaj Tripathi is the male lead. The film is described to "portray the hardships of the actress as she had to face a lot of criticism, insults and betrayals from

her own family members and the film fraternity who were influential in getting her films banned." The main reason for the success of 'Kinnarathumbikal', one of the films that catapulted her into the limelight, was solely her screen presence and energy, and with no other male lead in the

movie. Trying to fill in the gaping hole left by Silk Smitha in the low-budget softcore industry, Shakeela made her own mark with around 250 movies in her kitty -- heralding the 'Shakeela Tharangam' (The wave of Shakeela). Meanwhile, the Shakeela that

Indrajith is trying to portray doesn't look like she has much story to tell. The screen-space also seems to be overpowered by star cast Pankaj Tripathi. Let's hope the full length movie holds more than what the trailer showed. The film is produced by Sammy Nanwani and Sahil Nanwani, with music by Meet Bros and Veer Samarth.

Priyanka Chopra reveals husband Nick Jonas likes her 'natural' looks, calls him 'appreciator'

WASHINGTON(K-CN): Nick Jonas has

Chopra. The actor re-

2019 and revealed how her husband is

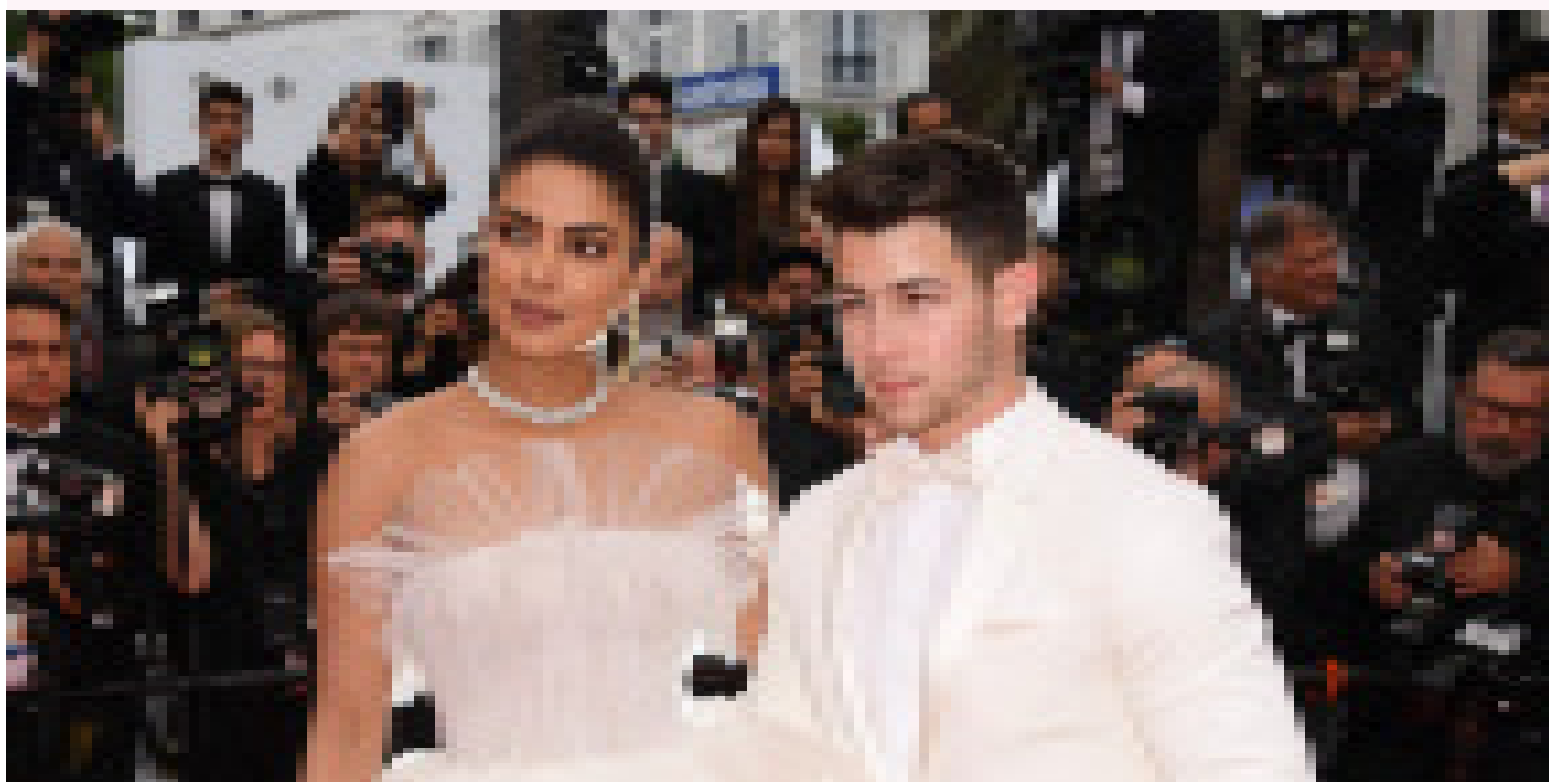
natural or a more glamorous look.

"there are days when he likes a really natu-

went all out for the event, wearing a sheer black top with a pussycat bow, a white blazer paired with a matching pair of pants. Adding a pop of colour to the whole look, she opted for striking pink eye makeup with a matching bold lip colour.

Earlier this month, Priyanka joined her fellow J sisters Sophie Turner and Danielle Jonas in celebrating the first night of their husbands' 'Happiness Begins' tour. All three women rocked Jonas Brothers T-shirts.

The actor shared that it was "really cool" that they all decided on coordinating their outfits since they "have such distinct personalities."



nothing but love and admiration for his wife Priyanka

cently spoke to People at Beautycon Festival Los Angeles

full of admiration for her whether she decides to go for a more

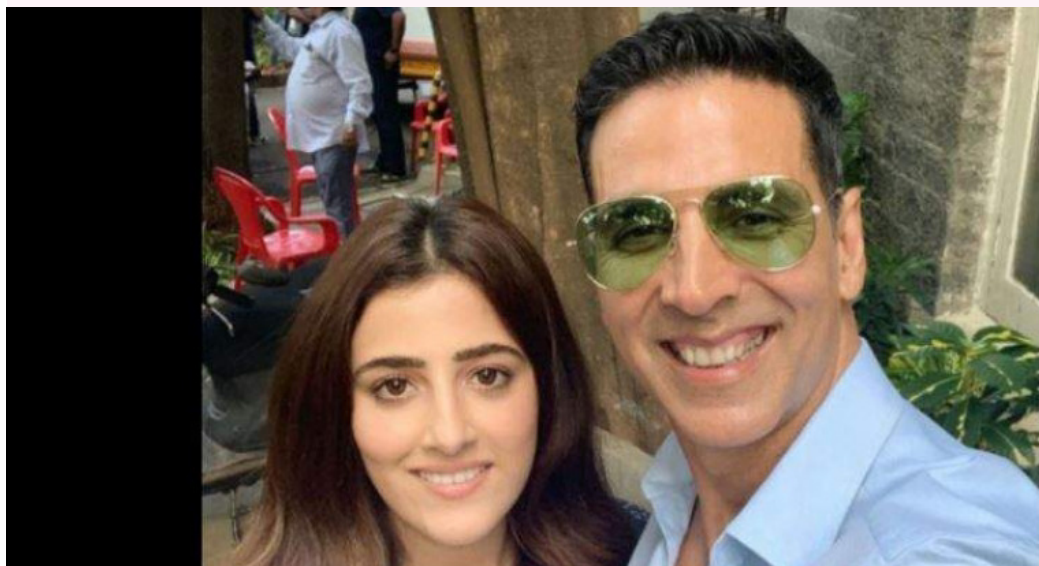
"He likes a bit of both," the 'Quantico' star, said, adding that

real thing."

The 'Mary Kom' actor added, "He's an appreciator. He's someone who can appreciate both things."

In honour of Beautycon, Priyanka

Akshay Kumar shoots with Kriti Sanon's sister Nupur for music video



MUMBAI(KCN): Actor Akshay Kumar on Sunday shot for singer B Praaks new single with actress Kriti Sanon's younger sister Nupur.

written by Jaani. B Praak has previously lent his voice to the song "Teri Mitti" in Akshay's film "Kesari".

ALSO READ:

It is reported that the romantic song is

Akshay Kumar has a namesake actor in

London!

The song will also feature renowned Punjabi singer Ammy Virk.

A lot of pictures are doing the rounds on the internet in which Akshay is seen

posing with Nupur and Ammy at the St. Xavier's college in Mumbai.

On the work front, Akshay will be seen in "Housefull 4" and "Good Newwz" this year.

Just 'normal' to exclude women in decision making process: Adil Hussain

MUMBAI(KCN): Actor Adil Hussain has offered support to the growing group of female artistes who are asking the reason for women's absence from the Bollywood delegation of producers and actors that recently met Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss issues faced by the film industry.

On Tuesday, an 18-member panel, including Akshay Kumar, Karan Johar, Ajay Devgn, Siddharth Roy Kapur,

Ritesh Sidhwani and CBFC chief Prasoon Joshi, met Modi to discuss how to take the entertainment industry to the next stage.

The meeting of the delegation came under fire on Wednesday for its exclusion of female representation with some activists and filmmakers pointing out that it was 2018 and asking, "Where are the women?" Adil took to Twitter to criticize the panel that met the prime minister.

Tell Me Who Your Friends Are And I'll Tell You Who You Are

Opposites attract, but birds of a feather flock together. So the sayings go. While some people

still hold on to the folktale of dissimilarity knitting people together, decades of research have painted a different picture: the overwhelming number of our friends and acquaintances are similar to us¹.

The people we know resemble us in the most basic social characteristics, such as gender, age, race, and educational background. But they also resemble us in more complex attitudes, such as political views, cultural tastes, and humor. Most people live in a social bubble and there is a good chance that this is true for your friend group as well.

Although our friends tend to be similar, many people are unaware of this because they did not pick their friends for their similarity. Our social connections depend first and foremost on whom we get to meet². And this depends on the social contexts we enter⁴ and the activities we engage in³. If you play a team sport, you will primarily meet people of your own gender (after all, many sports are segregated by gender). If you study at a university, you will primarily meet people who share your educational background.

Thus, having similar friends does not solely depend on whether you prefer similarity, and,

in some cases, it might not depend on your

Marina Tulin

preferences at all. In my Ph.D. project, I research the conditions and consequences of similarity in social relationships. In a large-scale Dutch survey, the majority of people interviewed report finding it “completely unimportant” whether their friends, colleagues, or neighbors are similar to them in all basic social dimensions (gender, age, migration background, education, and religion). Yet, we observe that the vast majority of them have social connections to people who are like them in these social dimensions.

The blessing and curse of similar friends “So what’s the problem? I really like that my friends are similar to me”, a professor asked at a recent presentation of my Ph.D. project. Unsurprisingly, it is usually White, highly educated men who ask me this question. As it happens, they are also the group that benefits the most from their social contacts⁵. In the Western industrialized world, we want to hold on to the idea of meritocracy (= a system that rewards ability and talent). However, securing your most desired job, house or even marriage partner might well depend on whom you know.

Social scientists refer to this as social capital, the benefits we receive from our social relationships. We make use of our social capital whenever we ask for advice, information, or help from

our social contacts. Both research and

common sense tell us that social contacts are crucial in achieving our aims. Nowadays, “networking” is not just a catchphrase, but it is the realization – supported by scientific evidence – that creating valuable social connections is indispensable for succeeding in life.

The problem is that not everyone has the same chances to build up valuable social connections. People already start off from different places. And if those who are more privileged primarily know others who are also privileged, then the initial advantages of those groups become amplified. If a white, highly educated man primarily knows White, highly educated men, then his chances in life become disproportionately better. The flip side is that those who start off with a disadvantage have fewer chances to improve their social position via their social contacts.

How do we break the cycle? Choosing our friends is among the most personal decision we can make. We all want to feel connected, secure and understood. To ask individual people to revise their friendship choices is not the takeaway message of this article. Individual solutions to a systemic problem won’t get us there. Instead, we can leverage the insight that our social connections are to a large degree circumstantial. Think of that school

friend you used to play with because you lived in the same neighborhood, the university friend whom you spend time with because you live in the same dorm or the colleague you have lunch with every day because you share the same office.

If these meeting opportunities have the power to create social connections between similar people, even at the absence of any preferences for similarity, then they sure have the potential to tie together dissimilar people by creating more contact opportunities between them. And the good news is that it is already happening: women increasingly enter work positions traditionally occupied by men, both companies and educational institutions employ diversity officers, and policies require neighborhoods to mix residents of different income groups.

Contact between groups is the number one predictor for the reduction in prejudice⁶. Such efforts could cross the boundaries of what it means to be similar. And maybe then, our social connections will no longer be a source of inequality, but rather a source of opportunities, irrespective of where we started off from.

I am a Ph.D. student in Sociology at the University of Amsterdam. My research is dedicated to understanding the conditions and consequences of diversity in social networks. I am interested in unraveling psychological and social-structural factors that facilitate meaningful social connections between different groups. Outside of the office, you will either find me at a yoga studio or drink coffee, read anti-racist zines, and discuss feminist issues.

Ten Scientific Breakthroughs That Rocked 2021

having found ethanolamine (H₂N-CH₂-CH₂-OH) in a dense molecular cloud—close to the center of our galaxy—for the first time.

Ethanolamine is a natural occurrence in meteorites, which supports the hypothesis that these molecules of life could have been synthesized on asteroids and planets.

This time the chemistry surrounding the ethanolamine in the cloud revealed that it could have been synthesized right there, in space. Where is this molecule found in living organisms?

Ethanolamine (H₂N-CH₂-CH₂-OH) is frequently found in cell membranes in many species, particularly in every cell in humans. Read the full story in our reportage.

IX. A billion years old fossil could be Earth’s oldest known multicellular organism

Paleontologists investigated one billion years old microfossils in sediments of the Loch Torridon, Scotland, consisting of a solid ball tightly packed or Bicellum brasieri. The sediments have preserved the fossils to the cellular level, revealing previously documented unicellular organisms and possible new organisms composed of two distinct cells.

If this find consolidates, it would be the oldest known fossil of a multicellular organism, changing the history of multicellular origin and evolution. Read the open access scientific paper here and a popular science note here.

X. Lessons learned on the second year of the Covid19 pandemic

The year 2020 ended with bad news and good news. The bad news was the tragic number of deaths left by the pandemic. The good news was the rapid development and clinical trials of anti-SARS-CoV-2 vaccine vaccines—many arrived with high effectiveness and hope. Unfortunately, dealing with a pandemic escapes from the hands of science; it highly depends on how the technologies are used. It goes way beyond virologists and epidemiologists.

The governments’ strategy, healthcare systems,

Alexandra de Castro

economies, and the willingness of developing countries and corporations to help vaccines reach the entire population are crucial to end the pandemic.

Mayo Clinic has been publishing data on vaccine effectiveness by age, comparing the mRNA vaccines Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna and the vector-based Janssen/Johnson & Johnson. Although severe side effects are rare (about 54 cases in a million doses), the site includes a complete review of all possible side effects.

Investigations on the Delta variant, identified in India in October 2020, showed being more

infectious non-Delta variants was 97% during the first month but

decayed to 67% at five months. Concerning hospitalizations, it was 93% overall up to six months. For the Deltavariant, The effectiveness was 93% declining to 53% after four months.

Later in November, a new “highly transmissible — spreading several times faster than Delta” variant was identified in Botswana and South Africa. Researchers called it Omicron. The bad news is that this variant carries many mutations that modify its spikes in the virus, which may challenge the ability of antibodies to recognize it, neutralizing the action of the available vaccines.

Promising antiviral During fall Pfizer and Merck announced they have developed effective antivirals. Paxlovid (Pfizer) showed to be able to cut hospitalizations by 89%, while Lagevrio (Merck) halved the risk of hospitalization, according to Nature. While these antivirals are still on clinical trials and the Food and Drug Administration “narrowly voted” on Dec. 1 to recommend authorizing Merck’s antiviral pill, on November the UK became the first country to take it the first step in approving Lagevrio on November 4.

Although the pandemics are apparently bringing more uncertainties than hope in the next year, one thing is for sure: we live in a global village that keeps getting smaller and smaller. If only a few developed countries are able to use the product of science, not sharing them with developing countries, ending the pandemic won’t be easy. The strategies should be as global as our economy.

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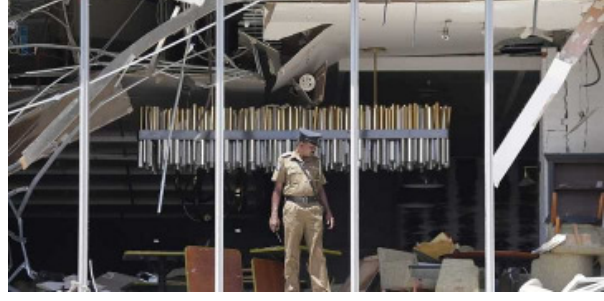
Illustration by Dana Dumea. (Concluded)

I am a science and technology communicator and a bilingual freelance writer—Spanish and English—with a research scientist background (Ph.D. in Physics). I hold a specialization in communication and divulgation of science and technology from the University of Oviedo, Spain (2014). My fifteen years of experience as a scientist include a postdoc position at the Institute for Theoretical Physics at the Leibniz University of Hannover, Germany (DAAD fellow); Professor of physics, tenured, at Universidad Simón Bolívar, Caracas, Venezuela; and Research Associate at the University of Sydney, Australia. For the last three years, I have been the Leader of the non-profit organization Persea Foundation. I joined United Academics Magazine as Editor-in-chief in 2021. My passions are theoretical physics, particle physics, climate change, astronomy, and space exploration.



42 people indicted in Easter attack, say Sri Lanka as it refutes allegation of 'conspiracy'

COLOMBO: A total of 42 people have been charged in the 2019 Easter bombings cases, the Sri Lankan police have said, dismissing Archbishop of Colombo Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith's allegations that the attack was a "conspiracy" by the current ruling party led by the powerful Rajapaksas, then in opposition, to gain power. Nine suicide bombers belonging to local Islam-



ist extremist group National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ) linked to ISIS carried out a series of devastating blasts that tore through three Catholic churches and as many luxury hotels on April 21, 2019, killing nearly 270 people, including 11 Indians, and injuring over 500.

In a statement on Monday, the police noted that Cardinal Ranjith on Sunday expressed his views to suggest that the "attacks were allowed to be carried out, despite having prior information about them, solely to obtain votes".

He also suggested that the bombings "were a conspiracy by the present government (then in opposition)" and "the detectives are not keen on revealing details regarding the investigations on the attacks".

Police said all allegations labelled by the Archbishop are rejected as its investigation into the blasts so far has led to the filing of 12 cases in the High Court and 42 people being indicted.

The attack stirred a political storm as the then government headed by President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was blamed for its inability to prevent the attacks despite prior intelligence being made available. During his tenure, Sirisena formed a presidential panel to probe the attacks.

The special presidential probe found Sirisena himself along with a host of other top defence officials, including Fernando and Jayasundera, guilty of ignoring prior intelligence.

The panel report had recommended criminal action against them.

Archbishop Ranjith has been regularly expressing disappointment over the police investigation and its slow nature.

He claimed that police were acting to help a political cover up and demanded action against those found the probe panel to have been responsible for ignoring prior intelligence warnings on the attack.

The current ruling party, Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), which was then in opposition, blamed Sirisena's estranged relationship with Wickremesinghe as the cause for ignoring the warnings.

The panel report has accused Wickremesinghe of appeasement of minority Muslim political allies for his inaction to tackle the rising Muslim extremism in the majority Buddhist island nation.

In November last, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa had asked his detractors to be careful while demanding quick action against the perpetrators of the deadly Easter terror attacks, warning that his government can "act tough" on the critics if the need arises.

"If they want rapid action, we could move Parliament to take away the civic rights of those responsible," he said, while addressing a public gathering in Colombo and alleging that his predecessor Sirisena neglected national security matters.

Rajapaksa had said the judicial proceedings were underway and his government will not interfere in them.

President Rajapaksa is the younger brother of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa.

The two brothers led a decisive campaign that helped end the island nation's three decade long civil war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The Rajapaksa family has dominated Sri Lankan politics for two decades.

Basil Rajapaksa, the youngest of Rajapaksa brothers, was in July sworn in as Sri Lanka's Minister of Finance, becoming the fourth Rajapaksa brother and fifth member of the first family to enter the Cabinet.

The eldest of the brothers, Chamal Rajapaksa, is a Cabinet Minister, as is Namal Rajapaksa, son of Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Chamal's son Shasheendra Rajapaksa is a non-cabinet minister.

70 km walkathon held to press for repeal of AFSPA and justice for those killed in Nagaland's Mon

KOHIMA: Hundreds of Nagas took part in a two-day 70-km-long walkathon from the commercial hub of Dimapur to here that concluded on Tuesday demanding the repeal of

enforcement of the Act in the state for the last 63 years and the killing at Mon was not an isolated incident.

AFSPA has repeatedly deprived innocent civilians of their right to live,

T Mhabemo Lotha, the commissioner and secretary to Nagaland governor.

The Naga civil societies congratulated them for giving "a good fight" on behalf of the Naga

by the security forces in Mon district.

In their memorandum the protestors requested the prime minister to take cognizance of the serious human rights violations committed by



AFSPA from Nagaland and justice for the 14 civilians killed by security forces in Mon district.

They submitted a memorandum addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home and Defence ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh through Nagaland Governor Prof Jagdish Mukhi appealing for immediate repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act also from the northeast in toto.

The memorandum, which was also addressed to BJP president J P Nadda, said brutality and injustice have accompanied the en-

forcement of the Act in the state for the last 63 years and the killing at Mon was not an isolated incident.

AFSPA has repeatedly deprived innocent civilians of their right to live, it said. The participants carried placards demanding the repeal of the "draconian" AFSPA and justice for the victims.

Their numbers swelled as they marched across villages and towns and after halting for the night at Piphema village, they resumed the march on Tuesday morning before reaching here.

The walkathon was supported by various tribal bodies and civil society organisations in the state. After reaching Kohima, the protesters along with Naga leaders went to the Raj Bhavan and submitted the memorandum to

people and said this was the beginning of the protests against AFSPA.

Demanding justice for the those killed in the botched anti-militant operation by the Army at Oting village on December 4, 2021, they said that "every Naga will continue the fight till justice is delivered".

Interacting with mediapersons, three women belonging Khiamniungan Naga tribe and in their 20s said, "We are concerned about the imposition of the draconian law and want the Government of India to repeal the Act." They also demanded justice for those killed

the Armed forces in the Oting massacre and initiate the process of justice for the victims, their families and the injured. The perpetrators should be tried by a civil court for criminal procedures and immediate and adequate compensation should be given to the families of the victims and to the injured, the memorandum said. The protestors also asked the prime minister to take cognizance of past atrocities and excesses committed by the Army and adequate compensation should be given to the victims of those incidents or to their nearest kin.

Haryana government declares strike by doctors illegal, invokes Essential Services Maintenance Act

CHANDIGARH: Health services in government hospitals in Haryana were hit on Tuesday as doctors suspended OPD work in support of their demands, prompting the authorities to declare their strike as illegal by invoking the Essential Services Maintenance Act.

The doctors are demanding the creation of specialist cadres for them and stopping the direct recruitment of senior medical officers.

Buckling under pressure amid the Covid crisis, the government acceded to one of the key demands of the doctors with Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar giving in-principle approval to the creation of specialist cadre post for MD or MS doctors.

Emergency services and COVID-19 vaccination drive continued in the state but OPD services were affected due to the strike, said Rajesh Sheokand of Haryana Civil Medical Services Association, a body representing government doctors.

Health Minister Anil Vij tweeted, "ESMA has been invoked in Haryana, now for six months health workers won't be able to go on strike. This step has been taken as a group of doctors has gone on strike which is creating obstacle in steps being taken to contain the Covid surge. The Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) allows the government to declare a strike illegal in the public interest.

An official statement issued Tuesday evening said the doctors will not be given any administrative work and will practice in their concerned speciality only.

When asked about ESMA being invoked, Health Minister Vij told reporters that the decision was taken keeping in view the surge in Covid cases in the state.

The entire country is fighting Covid and taking steps to contain the virus spread.

Amid this, a group of doctors going on strike is not acceptable, especially when an in-principle decision was taken with regard to their demands, he said.

"I had accepted their demands and sent these to the chief minister and other relevant departments. We had a positive approach towards their demands. After meeting with the chief

minister yesterday, in-principle approval was also given.

"However, they (the doctors) said even if in-principle approval was given, they will still go on strike. It seems there is someone behind them who wants to create obstacles in this fight against Covid, so we had to invoke ESMA," Vij, who also holds the home portfolio, said Regarding in-principle approval to the creation of specialist cadre post for MD or MS doctors, the statement said, "In-principle approval has been granted today wherein the government will create a special sub cadre for specialists who will be designated as Consultant or Senior Consultants."

"Earlier, a doctor with MBBS qualification and MD/MS qualification used to be in the same cadre."

"However, with the creation of specialist cadre posts these doctors will be able to focus on their work which will definitely protect their interest. Moreover, the specialist cadre doctors will now be posted in leading hospitals rather than Primary Health Centres (PHCs) which will ensure their swift promotions thereby nurturing their talent," the statement said.

The chief minister said the doctors have a very pivotal role to play in the society especially in the present crisis situation and the government is committed for their welfare, the statement quoting him as said.

The government order invoking ESMA said strike by doctors or other categories of employees of health department including those engaged on contract, honorarium basis etc and working in various entities including National Health Mission, Food and Drug Administration, Ayush, Haryana, has been prohibited for a period of six months.

"...An emergent public health situation has arisen due to surge in Covid cases and any strike by employees of health department, Haryana, at this time shall gravely affect the health and essential services required to safeguard the life of community," the order said. Haryana has seen a surge in Covid cases during the past fortnight.

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1,784 crocodiles counted in Bhitarkanika park COVID-19: 14,473 new cases in Karnataka, 10,800 from Bengaluru alone

KENDRAPARA: The population of saltwater crocodiles in the water bodies of Bhitarkanika National Park and its nearby areas has increased marginally this year.

supervision of wildlife personnel. The enumerators assisted by local forest staff and some herpetologists including noted crocodile researcher Dr. Sudhakar Kar, covered the

and 339 adult reptiles," informed Dr. Kar. In 2016, 1,671 crocodiles were counted in the park and the number went up to 1,682 in 2017. Similarly, 1,698 reptiles were

started increasing in the creeks, river and other water bodies in the park and its nearby areas, he said. The breeding and rearing programme of three species - saltwater crocodiles,



Forest officials have sighted 1,784 crocodiles during the annual reptile census conducted in January this year as compared to 1,768 in 2021. Divisional forest officer (DFO) of Bhitarkanika JD Pati said 22 teams were formed to count the estuarine crocodiles from January 6 to 8. Census of the endangered crocodiles was carried out under the

Bhitarkanika river system besides innumerable creeks, water inlets and nullahs. "During the census, we sighted 564 hatchlings (50 cm long), 378 yearlings (90 cm), 338 juveniles (180 cm) 158 sub-adults (6-8 feet) and 346 adult reptiles (over 8 feet). Last year, we had spotted 620 hatchlings, 325 yearlings, 288 juveniles, 185 sub-adults

spotted in 2018 and the next year, the number reached 1,742. In 2020, the population of crocodiles was 1,757. In 1975, the Ministry of Forest and Environment in collaboration with UNDP had started a crocodile breeding and rearing project in Dangamala within Bhitarkanika. Due to the success of the project, the crocodile population

Mugger and Gharial - was started at 34 places in West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and some other states of the country. But the saltwater crocodile conservation plan in Bhitarkanika is the most successful one. In 1975, Bhitarkanika was home to only 96 crocodiles, Dr. Kar added.



BENGALURU: Reporting another spike, Karnataka on Tuesday registered over 14,000 fresh cases of COVID-19 and five fatalities, taking the tally to 30,78,129 and the death toll to 38,379. The state that has been witnessing a steady surge in cases since the last week of December, today reported 14,473 daily cases, compared to 11,698 on Monday. Of the new cases on Tuesday, 10,800 were from Bengaluru Urban that saw 840

people being discharged and 3 deaths. **ALSO READ:** Karnataka CM Basavaraj Bommai rules out relaxation in COVID restrictions at places with less positivity rate. The total number of active cases across the state is now 73,260. There were 1,356 discharges, taking the total number of recoveries to 29,66,461, the health department bulletin said. While the positivity rate for the day stood

at 10.30 per cent, the case fatality rate (CFR) was 0.03 per cent. Of the five deaths, three are from Bengaluru Urban and one each from Kolar and Uttara Kannada. **ALSO READ:** Karnataka sees 12,000 cases, positivity rate up after 6 months. Apart from Bengaluru Urban, Dakshina Kannada recorded the second highest of 583 new cases, Mysuru 562, Tumakuru 332, Mandya 263, Udupi

250, followed by others. Bengaluru Urban district now has a total of 13,19,340 positive cases, followed by Mysuru 1,82,201 and Tumakuru 1,22,251. According to the bulletin, Bengaluru Urban tops the list among discharges with 12,43,995, followed by Mysuru 1,77,904 and Tumakuru 1,20,221. Cumulatively, a total of 5,79,74,606 samples have been tested in the state, of which 1,40,452 were on Tuesday alone.

Guidelines for Rural Poll

Bhubaneswar: The State Election Commission has issued detailed guidelines for smooth and safe conduct of the three-tier Panchayat Elections with strict adherence to the Covid-19 protocols. "I am directed to request you to ensure that the instructions of the Commission are strictly followed while conducting General Elections to PRIs, 2022," SEC Secretary RN Sahu told Collectors while issuing the guidelines. As per the guidelines, all persons involved with the electoral process will have to wear a face mask during the concerned election related activities. Social distancing norms shall be strictly obeyed by all persons connected with election related activities as per the extant COVID guidelines of the State Government and Ministry of Home Affairs. All polling personnel, security personnel and counting Staff shall be doubly vaccinated before being deployed/engaged in election related ac-

tivities. No polling agent/counting agent will be allowed to enter the polling station/counting hall without double vaccination. As far as practicable, large halls will be identified and utilized to ensure social distancing norms. Adequate number of vehicles shall be mobilized for movement of polling personnel, security personnel to ensure compliance of COVID-19 guidelines. Persons having symptoms of COVID-19 positive will not be engaged in polling duty. A person from a containment zone or in home isolation will not be deployed for election duty. As far as possible, persons suffering from co-morbidities susceptible to Covid-19 shall not be engaged in polling duty, as per the guidelines. "While filing nominations, either the candidate or one proposer shall enter the waiting room outside the Election Officer's office maintaining proper social distance (two meters/6 feet)," it said.

Similarly, either the candidate or his proposer shall be permitted to enter the room of the Election Officer. The next candidate will be sent to the Election Officer's room only after the first candidate returns. All the candidates who reach the Election Officer's room within the prescribed time shall be given tokens on first come first served basis. A COVID positive patient can submit nominations through his/her proposer. Candidates should compulsorily wear a face mask before entering the Election

Officer Office. Only one vehicle is allowed for the purpose of filing nomination, which should be strictly enforced, present in the hall. If the number of candidates is more, symbols will be allotted as laid down in rules. If more than one can-

campaign and they shall all wear face masks without fail. The maximum persons allowed during door to door campaigns is 5 (five) including candidates. As far as possible the priority should be given to the campaign through social/electronic media. In view of COVID-19, campaigning in large groups is not allowed. COVID positive candidates are restricted from campaigning in physical form. No Road show, padayatra, cycle/bike/vehicle rally and procession will be allowed. No physical rally of political par-

ties or probable candidates or any other groups related to election will be allowed. No victory procession after the counting will be allowed and not more than two persons will be allowed to accompany the winning candidate. Political parties/candidates having their camp office in different wards are instructed to wear face masks and often sanitize their hands, either with sanitizer or soap and water. Anybody violating instructions on COVID-19 measures will be liable to be proceeded against as per the provisions of Section 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 188 of the IPC, and other legal provisions as applicable. At the polling booth, there will be three queues, for male, female, and PWD/Senior citizen voters. Seating arrangements in polling stations for the polling personnel and polling agents shall be made as per the norms of social distancing.

If it is seen that the seating arrangement is not possible in the voting Hall by social distancing, the Polling Agents can sit outside the Hall where they can observe/see the voting process. COVID-19 patients who are quarantined will be allowed to cast their vote during the last hour of the poll day at their respective polling stations, under the supervision of health authorities, strictly following COVID-19 related preventive measures. Large gatherings and procession by the winning candidates are prohibited. Anyone, even after being doubly vaccinated, having any symptom of COVID like fever, Cold etc. will not be allowed in Counting hall. Every counting official and security personnel will be provided with a mask, sanitizer. No public gathering outside the counting venue during the process of counting. Candidates may appoint/replace counting agents in case the report is positive.

Officer Office. Only one vehicle is allowed for the purpose of filing nomination, which should be strictly enforced, present in the hall. If the number of candidates is more, symbols will be allotted as laid down in rules. If more than one can-



Blow for SpiceJet as Madras High Court dismisses its appeal against winding up order

CHENNAI: A division bench of the Madras High Court on Tuesday dismissed the appeal by SpiceJet against an order winding up the firm and having its assets taken over by an official liquidator on the grounds of inability to pay dues owed to a Swiss aircraft maintenance company. The bench consisting of justices Paresh Upadhyay and Sathi Kumar Sukumara Kurup pronounced the orders a day after the arguments were completed on Monday. Dismissing the appeal against the single judge's order winding up the firm, on a petition filed by Swiss-based stock corporation Credit Suisse AG, the bench extended the stay on the operation of the winding up order till January 28 so that the airline can approach the Supreme Court. After a marathon argument on Monday, the bench reserved the orders for Tuesday. Subsequently, the orders were pronounced upholding the single judge's verdict.

Microsoft Surface Pro X with Windows 11 launched in India. Check price, specifications here

Microsoft on Tuesday launched the most affordable 13-inch Surface device 'Surface Pro X' in the Indian

The counsel for SpiceJet cited several



grounds, including lack of due approval of the civil aviation authorities for SR Technics which was engaged for maintenance of its aircraft, for setting aside the single judge's order. He also claimed the Swiss-based assignee firm Credit Suisse AG cannot claim rights for receiving the payments due for SR Technics.

The single judge bench of justice R Subramanian passed orders on December 6 on a company petition filed by Credit Suisse AG for the winding up of SpiceJet and takeover of its assets by the official liquidator.

The company petition was filed under section 433 (e) and (f) r/w section 434 (1)

and 439 (1) (b) of the Companies Act, ten years. Supple-

ment was for a period of ten years. Supplemental agreements and amendments were also made subsequently. The SR Technics had raised invoices and SpiceJet had issued seven bills of exchange for the money due under the invoices and also acknowledged the debts from time to time by issuing certificates of acceptance.

Meanwhile, Credit Suisse AG entered into a financing agreement with SR Technics on September 26, 2012 under a transaction agreement. SR Technics assigned all its present and future rights to receive the payments of the money due under the seven invoices. Credit Suisse AG sought winding up of SpiceJet under section 433 (e) of the Companies Act as the

failure to meet its obligations was tantamount to inability to pay the debts. The operation of the winding up was put on hold upon SpiceJet fulfilling the condition of depositing five million US dollars. Now, the stay on the order has been extended till January 28.

Amid tensions with China, Taiwan starts rescue operation for missing F-16 fighter

Continued from page-1

to the 1990s. The air force has suffered a string of fatal accidents in recent years as its jets are kept under growing pressure from China.

Taiwan also has French-made Mirage jets and its own indigenous warplanes.

Taiwan's parliament on Tuesday passed an extra spending bill of nearly \$8.6 billion in its latest bid to boost defence capabilities against an increasingly bellicose China.

The government proposed a five-year special defence budget of around TW\$237.3 billion from 2022 as Chinese warplanes breached its air defence zone at unprecedented levels last year. Democratic Taiwan lives under constant threat of an invasion by authoritarian China, which claims the self-ruled island as part of its territory to be seized one day -- by force if necessary.

Beijing's sabre-rattling towards the island has increased considerably since President Tsai Ing-wen came to power in 2016, as she regards the island as a sovereign nation and not part of "one China."

Last year, Taiwan recorded incursions by around 970 Chinese warplanes into its air defence zone, according to a database compiled by AFP, more than double the roughly 380 carried out in 2020.

On Tuesday, Taiwanese lawmakers agreed unanimously to pass the special budget, although cut it by TW\$310 million. The package comes on top of a record annual defence budget of TW\$471.7 billion set for 2022.

It aims to acquire various precision missiles and mass-manufacture high-efficiency naval ships "in the shortest period of time" to boost the island's sea and air capabilities, the government said.

J Michael Cole, a Taipei-based political and military analyst, called the special budget "an encouraging and much-needed development" as Taiwan prioritises "asymmetrical" capabilities, such as unmanned vehicles, anti-ship missiles and air-to-ground cruise missiles.

"Many of those are 'counterforce' capabilities, with ranges that are long enough to hit targets along China's coastline" in line with the direction Taiwan's defence ministry has taken in recent years, said Cole, a senior fellow for Canadian think tank Macdonald-Laurier Institute.

"This move will also be welcomed by the United States, which often complains that Taiwan focuses too much on large conventional platforms at the detriment of smaller, more dispersible and less costly 'asymmetrical' capabilities."

Washington has remained a leading ally and arms supplier to Taipei despite switching diplomatic recognition to Beijing in 1979.

The budget includes a coastal anti-ship missiles system, a locally-developed Wan Chien (Ten Thousand Swords) cruise missile as well as an attack drone system and installation of combat systems on coastguard ships.

Cole also points out the benefit of ensuring quicker delivery as many of the armaments are produced domestically.

"The latter is a crucial part, as Taiwan needs to make sure it has the capabilities to deter, and if needed to counter, a Chinese attack now, not five, ten years from now."

China has publicised multiple recent military drills simulating an invasion of the island. For decades, analysts largely concurred that invading Taiwan is a challenge China could not pull it off but Beijing has dramatically closed the gap in recent years.

South Africa Parliament fire suspect charged with terrorism

Continued from page-1

Cape Town after the fire broke out on January 2 and appeared in court three days later.

Magistrate Zamekile Mbalo granted prosecutors a month's delay to determine Mafe's mental state and "if he is fit for trial" following a diagnosis that he was schizophrenic.

Mafe was initially charged with breaking into parliament, arson and intention to steal property, including laptops, crockery and documents, before the terrorism charge was added. Prosecutors said the additional charge was introduced after investigators viewed CCTV footage from parliament on Monday.

A new charge read the "accused is guilty of the offence of contravening the provisions of... the protection of constitutional democracy against terrorist and related activities", according to a court document.

"The accused did unlawfully and intentionally deliver, place, discharge or detonate an explosive, or other lethal device in... parliament building with the purpose... of causing extensive damage," it said without giving further details.

The blaze broke out before dawn on January 2, spreading to the National Assembly, the roof of which collapsed.

- Hunger strike threat -

Defence lawyer Dali Mpfu said Mafe was "taken (in) for mental observation on January 3" and diagnosed with "paranoid schizophrenia."

Mpfu is one of South Africa's most famous lawyers, whose high-profile clients have included former president Jacob Zuma.

He said Mafe was seeking bail. Mafe has vowed that "if his bail application does not proceed and he is not released from custody, as from this moment, he will embark on a hunger strike," Mpfu said in the small courtroom.

According to Mpfu, Mafe who is widely described as homeless, "does not understand why the government, which was not able to feed him when he was poor outside and fending for himself, now is so keen to feed him for a further period of time".

Without divulging details, Mpfu said his client believed he was being "victimised and targeted particular because he is poor".

He refused to say if he was appearing pro-bono for Mafe, when asked by AFP.

In stark contrast to his first court appearance where he was bearded and dressed in a grey shirt with knee-length denim shorts, on Tuesday he came in clean shaven in a light blue shirt and a dark jacket. Mafe turned his head around for pictures to photographers.

As the Tuesday hearing concluded, Mafe repeatedly shook his head from left-to-right, taking off his mask.

Since his arrest, debate has raged in South Africa over whether Mafe, described in the local media as homeless, was responsible for setting the building on fire.

Protesters outside the court building demanded his release saying he was a scapegoat. A group of around 30 people, picketed outside, brandishing handwritten signs such as "free Mafe," "he is innocent" and "he is not guilty."

- Sprinkler failure -

One homeless person recounted the events of the night the fire started. He was sleeping on a street near the parliament complex and heard a sound like a car collision. He later suspected that was the break-in before the fire started.

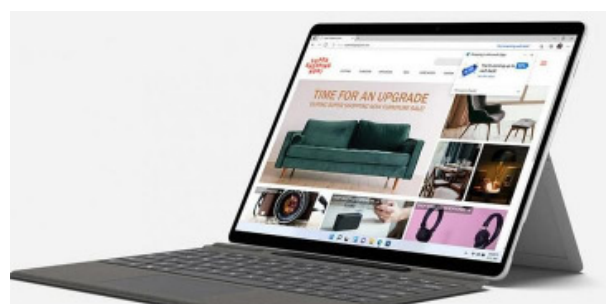
A preliminary report by the city of Cape Town last week said the fire detection system appeared "faulty," "sprinklers did not activate" and maintenance scheduled for February 2020 had not been carried out.

It took scores of firefighters more than two days to extinguish the blaze, which tore through the wood-panelled assembly chamber where parliamentary debates are held.

No casualties were reported in the fire, but the extensive damage has shaken the country and forced the authorities to move the annual state-of-the-nation address to be delivered next month by President Cyril Ramaphosa to an alternative venue in Cape Town.

Ramaphosa at the weekend said incidents such as the parliament fire, undermined the country's security and stability.

South Africa's parliament is located in Cape Town, whereas its government is in Pretoria, close to the economic hub of Johannesburg.



market.

Surface Pro X with Wi-Fi is priced at Rs 93,999 in India for regular buyers. For businesses, it will retail for Rs 94,599 in India for a model with 128GB storage. The model with 256GB storage will be available at Rs 1,13,299. These are the options powered by the SQ1 chipset. For those using SQ2, customers will have to shell out Rs 1,31,799 for 16GB RAM with 256GB storage and Rs 1,50,499 for 512GB storage.

In terms of features, the device sports a 13-inch PixelSense display with a resolution of 2880 x 1920 pixels, a 3:2 aspect ratio, and 10-point multi-touch support.

The Microsoft Surface Pro X is powered by eight-core Microsoft SQ1/SQ2 processors, which feature integrated Adreno 685/690 graphics. The chip is paired with 8GB or 16GB of LPDDR4x RAM and up to 512GB of SSD storage.

The laptop comes with Windows 11 and 64-bit emulation built-in. As per the company, apps such as Microsoft Teams and Office are optimised for ARM, as are other apps like Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom.

It has a 5.0-megapixel front-facing camera with 1080p HD video which automatically adjusts to lighting conditions.

The Surface Pro X also features two USB Type-C ports, Bluetooth 5.0, Wi-Fi support, and more.

Panchayat Poll Schedule Announced

Continued from page-1

lication of list of validly nominated candidates respectively.

The Model Code of Conduct issued by the Commission will remain in force from today till February 28 throughout the State, said the Election Commissioner.

No election rally or public meeting will be allowed. Only door-to-door campaigns will be allowed with only five people, said Mr. Padhi. No victory processes will be allowed. Vaccinated and COVID-19 negative people will only be allowed inside counting centers. Those, who will file false nominations, will be punished as per provisions of the Disaster Management Act, he warned.

About 67.51 lakh voters of 1669 GPs and 202 ZP Zones of 71 Blocks in 30 districts will cast vote at 22,379 booths on first phase while 62.10 lakh voters of 1514 GPs, 186 ZP Zones in 68 Blocks of 30 districts will cast their votes at 20,436 booths on the second phase.

Similarly, 56.53 lakh voters of 1382 GPs and 171 ZP Zones of 63 Blocks in 29 districts will cast their votes at 18,495 booths in the third phase.

In the fourth phase, 51.31 lakh voters of 1254 GPs and 163 ZP Zones of 64 Blocks in 27 districts will cast their votes at 17,089 polling booths.

In the last phase, 41.88 lakh voters of 975 GPs and 131 ZP Zones of 48 Blocks in 25 districts will cast their votes at 13,514 polling booths. In total, 2,79,35,520 voters will exercise their franchise in 91,913 wards under 6,794 panchayats in 30 districts of the State.

People expressed discontents and opposed TEMPL company in gram Sabha for Pacheri manganese and iron ore mines

Continued from page-1

undemocratic and violation of forest act. The said company has not intimated them regarding purpose of meeting. They have pocketed few people to conduct meeting ignoring others. The company has not done any thing for the welfare of the villagers as far as communication, education drinking water etc are concerned. Gram Sabha was held separately in Kanarda, Lasarda and Dhanuryapur of Bolani Panchayat on the same day. The villagers gave their views in the presence of Sarpanch Basanti Naik of Bolani Panchayat, Paresh Kumar Maharana, Panchayat extension Officer and officials of the Forest Department. The village meeting was held with huge police escort in the presence of Barbil sub-divisional police officer Himanshu Shekhar Behera and Bolani police IIC Bideshi Bagh.

Umtiti takes salary cut, allows Barcelona to register Torres

BARCELONA: Barcelona will register new signing Ferran Torres after defender Samuel Umtiti agreed to take a salary cut, the club said on Monday.

Torres was presented last week but hadn't been added to the squad because Barcelona couldn't make room for him without breaching the

Manchester City. The 21-year-old Spain forward signed a five-year deal with the Spanish club with a buyout clause of 1 billion euros (\$1.1 billion).

Team captains Gerard Piqué, Sergio Busquets, Jordi Alba and Sergi Roberto had all taken salary cuts last year to help the financially troubled club. Lionel Messi agreed to a 50% salary reduction but it wasn't enough for the club to be able to keep him, leading to his move to Paris Saint-Germain.

"Barcelona wishes to publicly express its gratitude to Samuel Umtiti for his willingness and the affection that he has demonstrated towards the club," Barcelona said.

Torres hasn't played since October because of a foot injury sustained on international duty with Spain. He was among the Barcelona players who tested positive for the coronavirus recently but was cleared on Monday and will join the rest of the squad in Saudi Arabia for the Spanish Super Cup. The Catalan club plays Real Madrid in the semifinals on Wednesday. Midfielder Pedri González also tested negative on Monday and will travel to Saudi Arabia alongside Torres.



Spanish league's strict financial fair play rules. The Catalan club said it reached a deal with Umtiti to extend his contract until 2026, reducing part of the salary the French defender was due to receive in the year and a half remaining on his contract.

"Through this contract extension, Barcelona will be able to increase its 'financial fair play' quota and thus register Torres with the Spanish league," the club said.

Barcelona paid an initial fee of 55 million euros (\$62 million) to sign Torres from

Third Test: India 141/4 at tea on day one as defiant Kohli continues to battle on

CAPE TOWN: India skipper Virat Kohli negotiated a phase of high quality fast bowling, especially by Kagiso Rabada, to take his side to 141 for four at tea on day one of the third and final Test against

South African pacers, particularly Rabada, asked plenty of questions to the batters with the flood lights operating at Newlands under

neath an overcast sky. Kohli, who got off the mark with a delightful cover drive in the morning, hit another majestic one off Marco Jansen in the afternoon besides a six he collected from a mis-timed pull off Rabada.

Rabada breathed fire in his seven-over spell but Kohli was able to see it off with required patience and discipline. Pujara once again showed positive intent but was undone by a beauty from Jansen that angled in from round the wicket and straightened just enough to

take the outside edge. Rahane, who has shown sublime touch all through the series but has not been able to convert the starts, was caught behind after Rabada got one to straighten from good length. In the morning, India fought their way to 75 for two after losing their openers early. Kohli, back to lead the side after missing the second Test, opted to bat on a pitch with decent amount of grass and clouds hovering over the spectacular Newlands ground.

The South African pace combo of Rabada and Duanne Olivier made good use of the conditions in the first hour by removing Mayank Agarwal (15 off 35) and KL Rahul (12 off 35) respectively. Rabada, playing his

50th Test, targeted the off stump channel consistently while Olivier was able to bring the ball back in sharply on a pitch with good bounce and carry.

The in-form Rahul, who has been brilliant at leaving the ball of late, poked at a rising delivery on the off stump and nicked it to the wicketkeeper.

Agarwal's tendency to play the ball with hard hands led to his downfall as Rabada induced a thick edge off his bat with Aiden Markram doing the rest at second slip.

Agarwal was dropped in the slips on 0 off Rabada in the third over of the innings.

With India in a spot of bother at 33 for two, Kohli and Pujara got together and steadied the ship.

Pujara was quick to put away the loose balls and his innings comprised four boundaries, including a pull shot off Olivier. Kohli took 15 balls to get off the mark but it was worth the wait as he leaned into a beautiful cover drive off Jansen.



South Africa here on Tuesday.

Cheteshwar Pujara (43 off 77 balls) and Ajinkya Rahane (9 off 12 balls) were the batters to be dismissed in the session, which yielded 66 runs.

Kohli (40 batting off 139), who has been found wanting against the off-stump line, did play a couple of free flowing cover drives but was more watchful when the ball was pitched in the fourth stump corridor.

The India skipper was batting alongside Rishabh Pant (12 bat-

Last week's performers, Bopanna and Sania bite dust in Adelaide-two event



ADELAIDE: Veteran Indian tennis players Sania Mirza and Rohan Bopanna, who enjoyed good runs on the Pro circuit last week, bowed out of the second Adelaide ATP and WTA events after first round defeats with their respective partners, here on Tuesday.

Sania and Ukrainian Nadiia Kichenok, the second seeds, lost the opening round of the WTA 250 event 3-6 3-6 to Czech pair of Tereza Martincova and Marketa Vondrousova in 61 minutes. They had reached the semifinals last week. At the men's event, Bopanna and his French partner

Edouard Roger-Vasselin lost their first round 4-6 6-3 3-10 in 69 minutes to Americans Steve Johnson and Austin Krajicek, who served extremely well and handled returns smartly.

Bopanna had won the men's doubles with compatriot Ramanathan.

Bopanna made too many errors in the Super Tie-Breaker, in which they fell behind 1-6 from where it was extremely tough to make a comeback.

Both Bopanna and Sania will now play at the season's first Grand Slam, the Australian Open.



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