

INFORMission Weekly



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Welcome to the Fifteenth Issue of INFORMission Weekly

The objective of this newsletter is to try and capture informative, interesting and relevant happenings from around our world and country across the week, without a focus on crime and sensationalism. The concept is that anyone can tune in on a weekly basis into a couple of pages and stay informed and updated. INFORMission Weekly will evolve in design, format medium and content as we go along. If you have any comments or feedback, do write into informission.weekly@gmail.com.

OF SPECIAL INTEREST THIS WEEK

Return of The Computer Wars

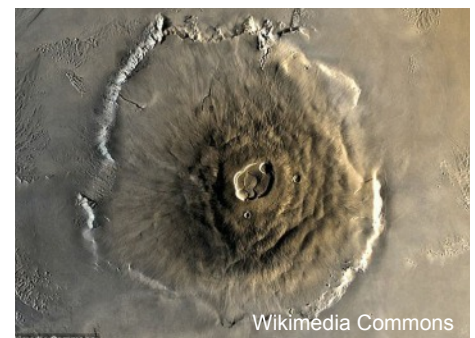


The BRICS Fund



Roberto Stuckert / PR / Flickr

World's Largest Volcano



Julien's Auctions / AFP

Leader to Know Aung San Suu Kyi The Lady



Htoo Tay Zar / Wikimedia Commons



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Syria: Chemical Weapons & US Intervention

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Football's Most Expensive



Einstein@Home



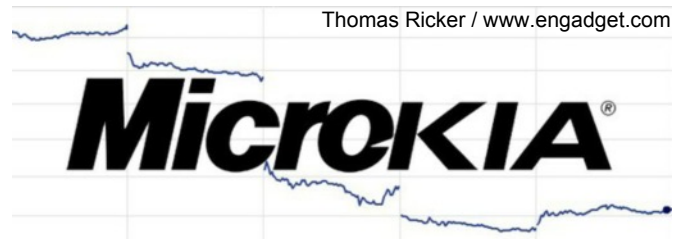
B. Knispel / NASA / Max Planck Institute

Microsoft Buys Nokia

Return of The Computer Wars

You may remember a time, not too long ago, when everyone had a Microsoft PC, no one had an iPad or iPod, Bill Gates was the richest man in the world, and Microsoft was 20 times the size of a struggling Apple. **You may also remember a time when Nokia was the largest mobile manufacturer on the planet – a \$250bn business** (way bigger than Apple) – practically everyone owned a Nokia. This was just 13 years ago at the start of the millennium – not very long back. But in 13 years Apple overcame Microsoft, overtaking them in market capitalization (size of business) from being 1/20th the size of Microsoft to becoming twice their size, and completely defeating their products in terms of quality. Then with the iPhone starting a smartphone revolution – Microsoft was thought to be finished – especially after Windows 8 failed. Nokia too was demolished when the smartphones came – the phone industry became the center of the new tech/computer race – Google vs Apple took over

the mobile software sector, and Samsung displaced Nokia as the king of phone manufacturing. Then, last week, **Microsoft bought Nokia – and paid a meager \$7bn for a company that was once worth \$300bn.** Perhaps all is not lost for these “Fallen Giants”, as the Wall Street Journal put it – far from it – the merger may signal the beginning of a new set of computer wars between the rivals, Apple and Microsoft, also including Google and its Android software. Microsoft has now officially entered the smartphone market with their own hardware (Nokia) and software (Windows Phone) – let’s see if they can stop the unstoppable Android or bring down the reigning giant - Apple.



The \$100bn BRICS Fund

Significant economically and politically, the 5 BRICS nations – **Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa** – have decided to set up a **\$100bn reserve fund to fight possible financial crises.** This comes on the back of India’s Rupee crisis and Russia’s fall-

out with the US over Syria and Snowden – and that is why it’s so significant. It marks a change of attitude from these 4 developing economies and Russia – **they are looking for an alternative source of financial help than the IMF** (In-

ternational Monetary Fund – helps in financial disasters) and the West. Although Indians only see bad RBI policies and incompetent Congress governance, the truth is that, in recent months, America’s tightening of its monetary policy has caused currency disasters in a multitude of nations – including India. Even though India has a great relationship with the IMF – this is an economic support system which it will be part of, having economic friends to rely on for currency help. It also shows that this is not just a

response to the recent crises – it is part of a gradual move of emerging economies away from their dependence on the West and towards a dependence on each other. According to current announcements, Brazil, Russia and India will contribute \$18bn each,

Roberto Stuckert / PR / Flickr



South Africa will contribute \$5bn, and China will contribute a mammoth \$41bn. For Brazil, India & South Africa, they now have a great source of support and help from a big economy like China and from each other. For Russia this is part of its drifting further from the West, as it extends the hand of political friendship and economic depend-

ence to China instead. For China, it’s a part of their bid to make the Chinese *Yuan* a true competitor of the dollar – with many big economies now depending on it – and part of its economic rivalry with the US. **The real significance is that the BRICS, which was just a group in name before, has finally done something as a financial cooperation - a new economic force has arrived.**

Banksy, The Artist

You may not have heard of him but Banksy (not his real name) is **currently the world's most famous street artist**. His works are now sought after by the "mainstream art world" and sell for millions of dollars at art auctions. His success is leading a revival of the art form and giving communities and the world a chance to find their artistic anonymous voice again. Street Art is art painted or expressed (since it is not always paint that is used) in public places such as streets, walls, pavements, metro stations, buildings etc. It is usually made by unknown artists working under the cover of darkness and using spray paint cans as the medium of choice! Through most of history it has been used to express protest, anger and rebellion. The artists are banned, persecuted, caught and all means are used to prevent the art from happening by civic authorities and police forces of the developed world.

In this context Banksy's success is extraordinary.

His art wherever found is now a tourist attraction and one seaside town in Britain – Torquay has seen its tourism flourish due to Banksy art on its walls. He is now the foremost exponent and practitioner



Julien's Auctions / AFP

of this "rebellious" art form in the world. Have a look at "Flower Girl" painted under cover of darkness on a gas station wall in Los Angeles in 2008 (with help from his local street artist friend "Brain-



Jan Slangen / CC2.0 / Flickr

wash"). My favourite is of course Wall and Piece, also the most famous Banksy artwork. Flower Girl will be auctioned (the entire wall, bricks and all, will be moved to the new owner's address) in December and I guess it will go for at least a million bucks!

It's also remarkable that no one knows Banksy's true identity apart from the fact that he is from Bristol in England! He does not like anyone buying his art (he does not get paid when his artworks sell, only the owners of the properties where he paints it) and says "I encourage people not to buy anything from anybody, unless it was created for sale in the first place".

The Super-Massif Volcano

The **Earth's largest volcano "Tamu Massif"** was discovered on Friday under the Pacific Ocean – thousand miles east of Japan. It is one of the largest volcanos in Earth's entire solar system –being only 25 percent smaller than Olympus Mons on Mars, which is the biggest. **To understand how big is volcano really is – the largest active volcano on land is Hawai's Mauna Loa covers an area of 2000 square miles, while "Tamu Massif" is 120000 (60 times!!) square miles in area.** Its top lies about 6500 feet below the ocean surface, while the base extends down to 6.4 kms deep. The discovery was made by a team of scientists from the University of Houston, led by Professor William Sage, and its discovery has rocked the scientific world. In terms of sheer size, it covers an area equivalent to the state of Arizona - its unimaginably big.



Leader to Know

Suu Kyi “The Lady”

"It is not power that corrupts, but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it."
-The Lady

Her name, she often jokes, is so hard to pronounce that her followers simply refer to her as ‘The Lady’. Maybe its not that; maybe its because, in Burma, when you say those 2 words – there is only one person you can possibly be talking about. Aung San Suu Kyi. **Imagine living, for 21 years, imprisoned in your own house – almost never being allowed outside** – all because you believed in democracy. That is what happened to Aung San Suu Kyi (pronounced Awn San Sue Chee).

She started as a political activist in the late 80s, to reform a nation ruled by military dictators for the last 20 years, and led a campaign for democracy. After much protest, and brutal killing of protesters, elections were held - and **she won. But instead of ceding power, the military put the nation's elected leader under house arrest**, under which she would stay for most of the next 21 years, and proceeded to rule the country under one of the world's harshest dictatorships for another 20 years, resulting in Burma becoming the Asia's second poorest nation, and the world's second most corrupt. But there was a hope in all this – The Lady, sitting defiantly in her



house, still upholding ideals of peace and democracy, still speaking out against the government at every opportunity. Her ever-smiling face become a source of inspiration for the Burmese people – hers soon became a household name in the country, even though it was spoken only in whispers, and despite all efforts to suppress her – her influence only grew. The whispers turned to roars as her growing supporters began protesting for democracy and asking for her release. She struggled those 21 years, but never gave up hope, changed her stand, or even con-

sidered violence. **She won the Nobel Peace Prize**, and was awarded for her courage by Indian, American, and other governments. But it doesn't end there for Aung San Suu Kyi, because her campaign for freedom actually succeeded. She was released in 2010, but released only back into the prison that was autocratic Burma - but she did not give up hope. She immediately legalised and reorganised her political party, who won the elections that occurred that year. Due to her efforts, the military junta dissolved the following year - **democracy, change and reform returned to Burma after 50 years**. An amazing person.

Einstein@Home: Pretty Nifty, Eh?

Ever wanted to participate in the process of high scientific discovery but did not know who to ask. Here's an idea. Download Einstein@ Home on your home computer and participate in a global hunt for new pulsars (rapidly spinning neutron stars) in our universe with the help of University of Wisconsin and the Max Planck Institute. **The global research project which has been on since 2005 and has 335,000 global users (or should I say researchers) helping scientists discover new objects in faraway galaxies.** Here is how it works – data from the LIGO Gravitational Waves detector and the Arecibo radio telescope is processed on researcher's idle home computers and searches for new radio sources and gravitational wave anomalies using



radio sources and gravitational wave anomalies using

the software BOINC (Berkeley Open Infrastructure for Network Computing). Einstein @ Home is part of the growing trend of Distributed Computing projects where researcher's computers are used in a coordinated way to act like one huge supercomputer (Einstein @ Home computes at 1005 PetaFLOPS – which would make it one of the top 20 most powerful supercomputers in the world) that can crunch large amounts of scientific data to make discoveries. The trend was pioneered in the 90's with SETI @ Home (which stands for the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) which looked for radio signals from space. While SETI was not found, Einstein @ Home has found many new exotic stars (which may be the work of ET anyway!). The project discovered the world's fastest spinning (8.6 milliseconds) binary pulsar and is now looking for the world's first discovery of a 1-millisecond gamma ray pulsar using data from the Fermi satellite.

Now you can even run Einstein @ Home on your Android phone! Here is the link if you want to participate <http://einstein.phys.uwm.edu/>

Football's Most Expensive



www.realmadrid.com

Gareth Bale's transfer from Tottenham Hotspurs to Real Madrid is the most **expensive transfer ever in the football world**. At a **100 million Euros**, it has shattered the previous record of 94 million Euros. The Tottenham star player had a superb season last year scoring 21 goals in the Premier League. Considered to be one of the best players in the world currently, his transfer beats the previous record by 4 million pounds, also held by Real Madrid when they bought Ronaldo for £80mn in 2009. The other interesting development after Issue 13 (where we reported the transfers) was the earth-shaking move of playmaker Mesut Ozil from Madrid to Arsenal for €50 million, making it the most expensive inbound transfer in EPL this season. Who bought him is perhaps the most shocking – Arsene Wenger, manager of Arsenal, famed for his cautious attitude to spending – making the most expensive purchase of the season. Arsenal fans are excited to no little extent, and so are Chelsea fans – as they captured Samuel Eto'o in the last few hours of the transfer window. EPL resumes from next week – stay tuned.

Syria: Chemical Warfare & American Intervention

A short (-ish) briefing on the major developments in Syria in the last couple of weeks – starting with the real shocker – Assad's lunatic chemical massacre

on **21st August; one attack that killed almost 1500 Syrians**. The entire explosion of media coverage and political focus on Syria was a result of this horrifically brutal and callous chemical attack on a largely civilian area – with over 3,600 infected with deadly toxins, and many of the casualties being normal Syrian citizens. So what about American intervention, the red-line and another Iraq? Firstly, Syria is nothing like Iraq in 2003. The worst civil war of the 21st century has already been raging there for the last 3 years – claiming a horrifying 110,000 lives. There was never a war in Iraq before the Americans came – this one can hardly get worse by their coming. **Important to know is that Obama does not want to pull troops out of Afghanistan and drop them into Syria – only bombings, missile strikes and drone attacks on Syrian Army posts – he is not “doing a Bush”.** Lastly, this has nothing to do with oil, unlike Iraq. Do I sound like I am in favour of intervention – no, no – IW is neutral and anti war, and in this case – so am I, as explained below. The US has made this about a chemical red line that no one can cross – according to US Secretary of State John Kerry, it was “beyond reasonable doubt” that Assad had used chemical weapons, i.e., crossed the red line – and must be stopped/punished before he does so again. But the truth is chemical weapons have been in use in Syria for almost a year

now by both sides – rebels and government – and everyone has known about it – repeated reports from Human Rights Groups, Israeli, British, and

Wikimedia Commons



French governments, and undeniable ground evidence. The Americans easily denied all this for a year until the massacre – there is no red line; and there are no good guys. **The most important bit is that both sides have committed atrocities, both sides have used chemical weapons, both sides contain extremists – and this is no longer an uprising, it's a bloody, sectarian civil war –** Sunnis massacring Shias; Shias massacring Sunnis. So, we should not, like much of the media, get too caught up in this politician's response to one of Assad's many atrocities – instead focus on the main issue – Syria is too far gone for anyone to win; too many have died – its too much about the *fitna*; the only hope in Syria, if any, is to peacefully compromise and stop this endless fighting any way we can.

The Human-to-Human Brain Interface

A revolutionary experiment, described (rather uncreatively) by most as “an example of Mind Control”, took place last week – the first **human-to-human brain interface**. “What?????” you ask, and I shall explain. It all began early this year, when a couple of experiments on rats, rat telepathy and human-rat interface, made big news around the world. In the first experiment, conducted by Duke University, North Carolina, in February, **two rats were trained to push a lever on the glowing of light above it** (a reward given when you do it right), then, connected brain-to-brain by electrodes – they were put in 2 different rooms thousands of miles apart similar looking room with 2 similar levers. When the first rat was shown a glowing light – he did what was expected of him – then the second rat – thousands of miles away did the same....he pressed the lever even though there was no light glowing in front of him, just because there was a light in front of the other. **Telepathic communication – pretty amazing, you have to admit.** But then again, you might not – it’s just a couple of rats after all – years before anything like that works on humans. Then, just a month or two later, Professor Seung-Schik Yoo from Harvard University goes the next step – **he connects human and rat brains** – using very different technology and computer-brain interfaces – he gets a **human controller to willingly manipulate the twitching of a rat tail**. It sounds small but **the possibilities are quite amazing – possessing rats and other ethically questionable possibilities**. It turns out that was **just another stepping stone**. This is the real one.

Last-to-last week, Indian researcher Rajesh Rao and his colleague Andrea Stocco at the University of Washington gave us the first look at a ‘Mind Meld’ with each other – as they achieved a sort of telepathic communication. Translation: Rao, while playing a video game, **moved his finger to press a button, and his partner – in a complete other room – did the exact same movement, unconsciously**. His finger just moved, on its own, imitating Rao’s movement – their only link being a few wires and the Internet. Creepy – very creepy. Maybe mind control was a fitting title....but it wasn’t, and let me tell you why. We will get a little technical now – but not too much – about how this was achieved, **why it’s significant,**

and why the lecture about rats. The most important detail is that this is **non-invasive brain-to-brain communication – nobody operates on your skull or puts electronic implants in your brain like the movies – its done through EEG** (Electroencephalography) – an age old medical technique that reads your brain’s electrical activity – you just wear a sort of cap with some wires sticking out of it, and that’s all you need for telepathy. Well, **not exactly telepathy**



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– this technique has one issue – the receiver is unconscious of the telepathic communication. It’s still very useful for the disabled, etc. – but it’s still not true communication. Here is where the rats come in – there the communication was **consciously telepathic – rat no. 2 received information telling it which lever rat 1 is pressing**, and realizing that lever is correct – it presses it – like cheating in a test. Conscious telepathic communication in rats, and unconscious telepathy in humans

– combine the 2 techniques and **you get real telepathy between humans – over the Internet**. The Internet becomes a “way to connect brains” in Stocco’s words, and by simply combining these 2 techniques – we make telepathy a reality. To conclude I quote CNN’s Elizabeth Landau, who says, rather aptly, **“Every so often, you see something that makes you think: The future is here.”**

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