

# INFORMission Weekly



Editor : Sumer Sharma

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## Welcome to the Nineteenth 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](mailto:informission.weekly@gmail.com).

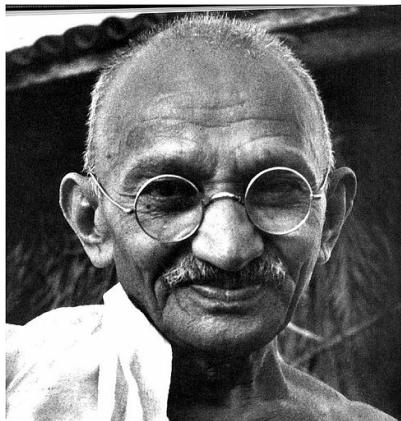
## OF SPECIAL INTEREST THIS WEEK

### The SHUT\_DOWN



Keith Ellison/Flickr

### Mahatma Gandhi, Person of the Century



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### Mr. McAfee's Latest Gadget: Hiding From Big Brother



Dave Gordon/Landmark Report

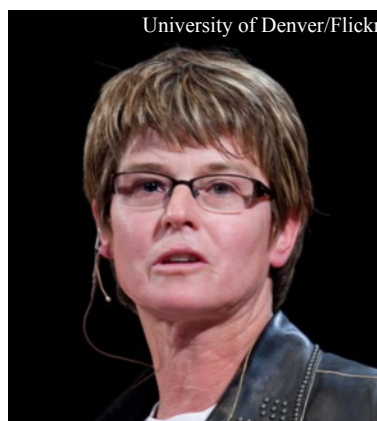
### Comet ISON is Swinging By Keep Your Eyes Peeled



### All About the New "Hummingbird"



### WONDER WOMAN Ramona Pierson



University of Denver/Flickr

### The IPCC Report: Global Warming's Getting Worse



[www.theresilientearth.com](http://www.theresilientearth.com)

### Champion's League Update



Ronnie Macdonald/Wikimedia Commons

# Issue # 19

# The SHUT\_DOWN

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, the government of the **United States of America** officially shut down. Wait, WHAT? It's the biggest news of the week, and it requires a little explanation. So firstly, and most importantly, **only non-essential services of the government have been shut down**. That was a little unclear to me too, so I'll elaborate with some examples. **NASA is officially shut down** –

but the astronauts in the International Space Station are not going to run out of air, or crash - that is an essential service. So **3% of NASA's 18,000 employees will continue to perform essential services**. Similarly, the **armed forces and medical workers will not go on leave**. But most of the **CIA, NSA, etc.**

**will**. The zoo, and national parks will be shut – but the animals will still be fed. However, all these essential workers will work the next few days until government returns to normal operation without pay – because the government doesn't have any money to pay them with – more on that in a moment. The cost to the US economy is massive, estimated at over a billion dollars a day. So, why?

The reason for this entire collapse lies in the American style of government – which allows for a very unusual possibility – where **one political party forms the government, while the other political party holds the majority in the House of Representatives**. In very simple

terms, that means one bunch of guys is governing the country, while their enemies hold a majority in the law-making body – their enemies make the laws. This kind of provision exists only in the US – imagine if the Congress was governing, but BJP had majority in Lok Sabha! What this in effect means is that **it becomes difficult for the governing guys to make/pass any laws to help them govern because their enemies are the lawmakers**. Something similar is happening in the US right now.

Barrack Obama is the president, and the Democrats have formed the government, but the Republicans have a majority in the House of Representatives (their Lok Sabha). Like India's financial year is from

March to April, the American fiscal year is from **October to September**. On **October 1<sup>st</sup>** every year a budget is passed by the House of Reps that approves the expenditure of the gov – the gov. tells what it wants to spend on – the lawmakers say what's okay and what's not – and give the gov. the approval to spend the money. But this



October 1<sup>st</sup> the **Republicans at the House of Reps** said no to the budget – and the government was left without any approval to spend any money – they can't pay salaries, debts, anything. Hence, the shutdown. Why the budget wasn't passed is because of **a fight between the 2 parties over 'Obamacare'**,

**Obama's expensive plan to revolutionize health-care in the US**. A major portion of the plan was to be approved in the budget and begin operating from 1<sup>st</sup>, but the **Republicans are against Obamacare** – they think its too expensive. What its trying to do is deliver health insurance to everybody – its first few reforms gave the poor and elderly state-funded health insurance, this next reform gives everyone else who doesn't have insurance state-subsidised health insurance. That means **the gov. pays part of everybody's health insurance, and everybody has a health insurance**. The Republicans didn't like it, so they tried to negotiate a deal – **delay Obamacare for a year – we'll pass it in 2014 – if**

**you bring it right now – we will fail the budget**. The Democrats did not agree to postponing the most important reform of Obama's presidency – they brought the bill anyway – and the disagreement of the two parties led to a stalemate. And so, on 1<sup>st</sup> October, **no conclusion was reached – causing a late/failed budget and an embarrassing government shutdown**. It's the

first time in 17 years that this has happened; but that also shows it has happened before – its not a crisis. Its more of an embarrassment at the world scale, and also an eye-opener, exposing the faults in US governance/politics. Oh, and check out [nasa.gov](http://nasa.gov) – its pretty funny actually.

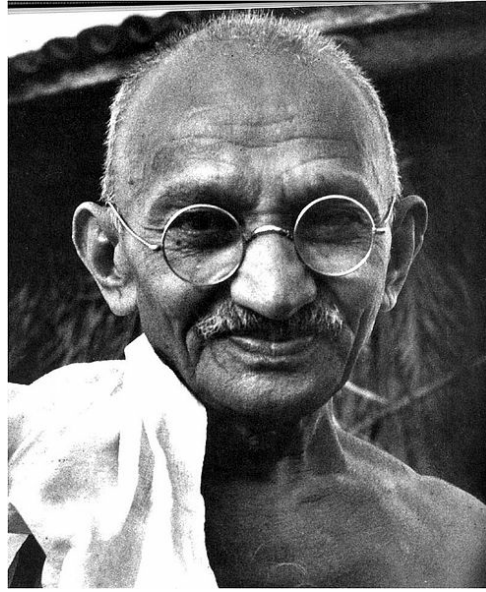
Andrew Winning/Reuters





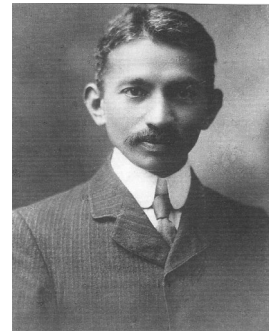
# Mahatma Gandhi, Person of the Century

As we celebrated the **144<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi**, and the newspapers were full of ads and articles on his greatness, **it occurred to us that perhaps in all the focus on his achievements – “gaining India’s independence in a non-violent peaceful way”, we may forget his journey and the lessons he learnt and applied and taught that are so valuable.** Some of these are things he has written about in **his wonderful autobiography “The story of my experiments with truth”** and **some things we can surmise from the famous movie “Gandhi”** where Ben Kingsley almost made us believe he was the Mahatma. When we look at Gandhi’s story, many times **we do not realize that Gandhi was not a revolutionary in the classical sense** (young, full of anger and hate and fanatic about overthrowing and changing the status quo) and became one much later in his life. In the beginning he was (like most men of his generation) enamored of the British system and its greatness. **He went to study in England**, he wanted to be a Barrister (British name for lawyers) and then **went to South Africa to practice his profession within the British system**



**of justice and oppression. It was only when he was thrown out of the first class coach of a train (it was only for whites) in South Africa that he realized he was not actually British and would never be. He started his political struggle after this incident and founded the Natal Indian Congress party in 1894. For the next 21 years he worked in South Africa as a political activist and invented and honed his principles of Satyagraha (voice of truth) and non-violent protest. It was only in 1915, at the age of 46 years, that he returned to India and joined the Indian Congress party and started applying his revolutionary concepts of Satyagraha and change through non-violent means to the Indian struggle for independence. His story is one of personal hard-**

**ship, years of hard work, great unflinching determination, steely resolve, principled integrity and peaceful means of change. We should remember these lessons in this age of impatience, anger and discontentment, and expectations of instant and radical change.**



Gandhiserve.org/Wikimedia Commons

## Mr. McAfee’s Gadget That Will Hide You From Big Brother

This is a sort of response to the whole **‘Big Brother’ scandal from Issue 5** – so lets get a little background. Edward Snowden, an ex-worker at the American intelligence gathering organization NSA (National Security Agency), leaked details of/told the world of the Prism program run by them. They basically watch everything and everyone – they collect phone records, online account information – every detail of your social lives. We learnt that there is no privacy,



and no hiding from the NSA. However, **John McAfee, fugitive millionaire, software engineering genius, revolutionary hacker, and founder of the world famous McAfee anti-virus company, seems to think otherwise. This week he launched his coolest product yet – the D-Central - “little black box” that will hide you from the spying NSA, and anyone else. The features he claims it will have are amazing, unbelievably so - its probable that some of them will be absent from the final product. But the prototype, he says, will fit into your pocket, and yet produce a wireless network between 200 & 400 meters (that’s massive) – all this from a battery powered, \$100 device. It gives you secure, inscrutable, truly incognito way to connect to the Internet – it’s the anti-NSA router. The price is the most difficult to believe, but remember – this is the same eccentric man who founded McAfee against all odds and then sold it, who is implicated in a murder case, and a genius superhacker – anything is possible.**

# All About the New “Hummingbird”

Last week, we reported on Google’s 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, and also mentioned that they had **celebrated it by announcing their brand new search algorithm (whatever that means), the “hummingbird”**. So this week, we’re going to follow up with an explanation of what hummingbird is, and why it’s important. First things first – **what’s a search algorithm? It’s a programming term, which you can basically think of as a formula or recipe based on which Google’s search engine runs – sorting through billions of pages and returning the best results.** It’s important to know that this **algorithm is a secret – if everyone had it, everyone could start their own google search – and that this is only the second time their algorithm has been changed, the last being 2001.** They do have small changes every once in a while, but this fundamental a change is rare – so what has changed? Its faster and more precise, hence the name hummingbird, because of two interesting new features called “entity search” and “conversational search”. Entity search means that instead of just looking for the keywords in your search string “how old is Obama”, it tries to understand the meaning of the search and give relevant results. Or search “best rock band of all time”, and Google gives a list of bands. This feature is directly linked to the next one – conversational search – which completely changes Google’s voice search. Instead

of speaking keywords into the mic, you ask a conversational question, like I asked “what’s an iPhone” – it understood the meaning – and told me what an iPhone is. It’s something completely



new, and game changing. There are other technical changes that have made it faster, and also some that made more accurate – but instead of trying to explain those programming updates – Google gave examples. When you search “acid reflux prescription”, you get sites giving advice on treatment, instead of just a list of medicines. Search “pizza hut calories per slice”, and now it gives you an actual Pizza Hut statistic. The changes have been in place for a month, even though we didn’t realize it – but that may be a good thing - degradations spawn a storm of complaints, improvements usually go unnoticed.

## The Comet ISON is Swinging By Keep Your Eyes Peeled

**And its finally here – the much awaited, much anticipated – possible comet of the century – oh wait, you have no idea what I’m talking about. Of course not – I didn’t either – but among scientists, this comet ISON is some-**

**thing of a celebrity.** It is massive – 3,100 miles across – and scientists hope that this comet will provide a magnificent shining spectacle when it passes by Earth. NASA has even launched a giant balloon to track and photograph this super-comet. But before you get all excited for a brilliant nighttime display in December, I must become the



devil’s advocate, and warn/inform you of the news this week. On October 1<sup>st</sup> (one exciting day), the comet passed close to Mars, and was photographed by one of the various NASA observatories/rovers on Mars, and the results, shown alongside, were less than satisfactory. Lets hope we get a better show. By the way, this is a must try super cool graphic thingy [www.solarsystemscope.com/ison/](http://www.solarsystemscope.com/ison/)



NASA/JPL/University of Arizona



# WONDER WOMAN

## Ramona Pierson

*“Close your eyes. Now imagine you have to cross a street. You don’t know how far that street is and you don’t know if you’re going straight and you hear cars whizzing back and forth, and you had a horrible accident that landed you*

I’m going to tell you a story. It’s got nothing to do with last week’s news, it’s got nothing to do with you or your life. It’s just a story. **The most inspiring story I have ever heard. The story of Ramona Pierson.**

It all begins in the year 1984, with a young 22-yr old US Marine who excelled at Maths, and loved to exercise. She was developing algorithms that would aid fighter attack squadrons, and had just gone out for her daily run with her dog when she was involved in a horrific accident that changed her life forever. A drunk driver hit her and her dog at an intersection, after running a red light, killing the dog instantly and inflicting Ramona with unimaginable injuries. She was sent flying in front, and then the car ran over her legs – crushing both of them – and the bumper ripped open her neck. Her chest was torn open, she was blinded and unconscious, her lung was in danger of collapsing – she was as close to death as you can get – but passersby saved her life. They kept her exposed heart beating, used pens to keep her windpipe open and lungs from collapsing, and got her to a hospital just in time. But that was when her terrible odyssey began. She was put into a drug induced coma and operated on time and time again. She survived – but woke up 1 and a half years later – 18 months spent in coma. And when she woke up, this sprightly US Marine was blind, disfigured, bald, unable to speak, unable to eat, without legs, covered in scars, and weighing 30kg. “I was in a grocery store with one of the ladies, and I hear this kid ask his mom, ‘What happened to her?’ When the mom replied, ‘Shhh,’ I knew I must look really messed up.” Ok now wait – I sense you’re getting depressed – don’t worry, this is a story of amazing comeback – because although the rest of her body had been reduced severely – her brilliant algorithmic mind kept working. The hospital labeled her a “gomer” – a hopeless case, and kicked her out soon enough, after some more operations and cosmetic surgeries. She was sent to an old age home, where the second half of her life began. The amazingly wise and resourceful seniors became her friends and mentors as they taught her how to speak, eat, and return to living life like a normal human being. Her descriptions of them, and how they taught her are very touching – but she remarks that it was bitter-sweet, because “they were declining, and I was getting better because of them.” Her biggest hurdle was learning to cross the road again – she was now blind, and had already faced a horrific accident before – the fear was palpable. But her loving new friends at the old age home and her loyal guide dog made her achieve the seemingly impossible, and she began to sustain herself little by little, leaving the home in 1989, and starting to attend college. Her still intact mind helped –



“I learned to create a cognitive map of the world, sort of like *The Matrix*,” she says. “I see the world in my head.” And she went on to study 2 years of psychology, get a master’s in education, and a PhD in neuroscience, all while facing a blindness she found “terrifying”. It took over a 100 surgeries – implanting a nose that looked nothing like the original, regrowth of hair, translocation of fat, supported legs – but she began to look and feel like a normal human being again. Those years of struggle changed her as a person, and made her one of those few, who are beyond human.

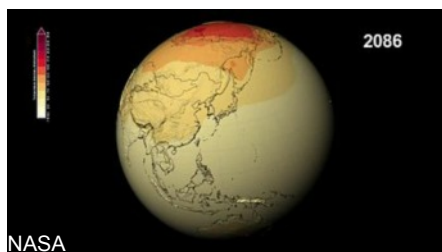
When her legs returned to full operation – she wanted to do everything – driven by the feeling that she had fallen behind the world in her years of rehabilitation – in spite of the fact that she was in perpetual pain almost all of the time. She became a blind rock climber and cross-country skier – imagine what courage that takes. She qualified for the Paralympics, and set many records there. Then, she graduated to the regular, non disabled cycling team and won a silver medal at the National Championships – all this while she was blind. And finally, 11 years after the accident, she opted for an experimental surgery that returned sight to her – after 11 years of blindness, she could see again. And she just continued moving forward – remaining a courageous adventurer, she became an inspiring innovator. It started with working at a brain research center to help soldiers returning from the Middle East, before her attentions turned to education. She developed a data-driven software called The Source to help the Seattle public school system, and then went into the industry fully with her first startup SynapticMash that transformed the philosophies behind the software into a business. It was acquired by a multinational learning company Promethean World soon after for \$10m; and Ramona started working there to become Chief Scientific Officer and Head of Policy just 5 years later. In 2012, she co-founded her most important venture – a social network called Declara – an intelligent social learning platform that aims to connect people to the content their looking for by adapting according to the behavior of its users. For example, if you want need some info related to biotech, it finds users who are experts in biotech and connects you to them, while also giving you latest information about what you are looking for. Although only in a corporate hemisphere at the moment, it just recently reached \$5m in amount of money raised through investment. From being the equivalent of an infant – she couldn’t speak, see, eat, walk – disfigured beyond recognition – she has become the CEO and founder of a \$5m company, a premier entrepreneur, and one of the world’s major thinkers and innovators. WONDER WOMAN.

*Inspired from an article by Ashlee Vance – read it at [www.businessweek.com/articles/](http://www.businessweek.com/articles/)*

*Watch her TED Talk at [www.youtube.com/TED](http://www.youtube.com/TED)*

# IPCC Report: Global Warming is Getting Worse

The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) published their latest report last week - it unequivocally states "Global warming is unequivocal". Jokes apart, this report gives an extremely dire image of the state of the Earth today. These reports are given once every 5 years, and the 2013



report is even worse than the 2007 report – that is rare. We thought all the reforms and green changes were working, but

here we have clear evidence that global warming is still getting worse. As the report tells us, sea levels are rising faster than ever in the last 2,000 years, and atmospheric CO2 is at an 800,000 year peak. It states that human influence in climate change is clear, and that the "world is warming".



## Champion's League Update

It has been an interesting week for soccer and the Champions League in particular. With all the exciting matches that took place, there was no shortage of drama. On Wednesday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, there were a whole lot of exciting matches. Ajax took an AC Milan in a match where everything was left to the last minute. Literally. **It ended as a 1-1 draw but both goals were scored in the ninetieth minute.** FC Porto played Atletico Madrid. **Atletico just about managed a 2-1 victory over Porto. Cesc Fabregas' 75<sup>th</sup> minute goal allowed FC Barcelona to beat Celtic.** Chelsea FC found new form in their clash with Steaua Bucharest, giving the home side a 4-0 hammering. A disappointing performance by Marseille insured a 3-0 victory for last year's runners-up Borussia Dortmund. Arsenal took the world by surprise with their comfortable 2-0 victory over Napoli with Mesut Ozil being their star player. On Thursday, Manchester City, under their new management, were taken apart by Pep Guardiola's Bayern Munich in a 3-1 loss. Paris Saint Germain scored 3 goals within the

first half hour and it stayed that way as PSG annihilated Benfica in a 3-0 win. Real Madrid obliterated FC Copenhagen in a comprehensive 4-0 victory. Juventus and Galatasaray had an extremely exciting encounter that ended as a 2-2 draw. Juventus, trailing by one, scored in the 78<sup>th</sup> and the 87<sup>th</sup> minutes and they looked like they were going to win. However, Umut Bulut of Galatasaray equalized in the 88<sup>th</sup> minute. Manchester United clung on to 1<sup>st</sup> place in Group A by drawing to Shakhtar Donetsk. The final score was 1-1.

Group A	Pts.	Group B	Pts.	Group C	Pts.	Group D	Pts.
Man Utd.	4	Real Madrid	6	PSG	6	Bayern	6
Shakhtar D	4	Juventus	2	Olympiakos	3	Man City	3
Leverkusen	3	Copenhagen	1	Benfica	3	CSKA Moscow	3
R Sociedad	0	Galatasaray	1	Anderlecht	0	Pizen	0
Group E	Pts.	Group F	Pts.	Group G	Pts.	Group H	Pts.
Shalke 04	6	Arsenal	6	Atletico	6	Barcelona	6
Chelsea	3	Dortmund	3	FC Porto	3	Milan	4
FC Basel	3	Napoli	3	Vienna	1	Ajax	1
Steaua	0	Marseille	0	Zenit	1	Celtic	0

## Sources

Mcafee – The Economist, Digital Trends, Daily Mail, TG Daily

The Shut Down – The Economist, BBC, The WSJ

ISON – LA Times, NBC News, Universe Today, CNN

Ramona – Bloomberg Businessweek, The Economic Times, TED Talks

IPCC Report – Scientific American

Hummingbird – searchengineland.com, Telegraph

Gandhi – Wikipedia, 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth', 'Gandhi' The Movie

Champions League - ESPN