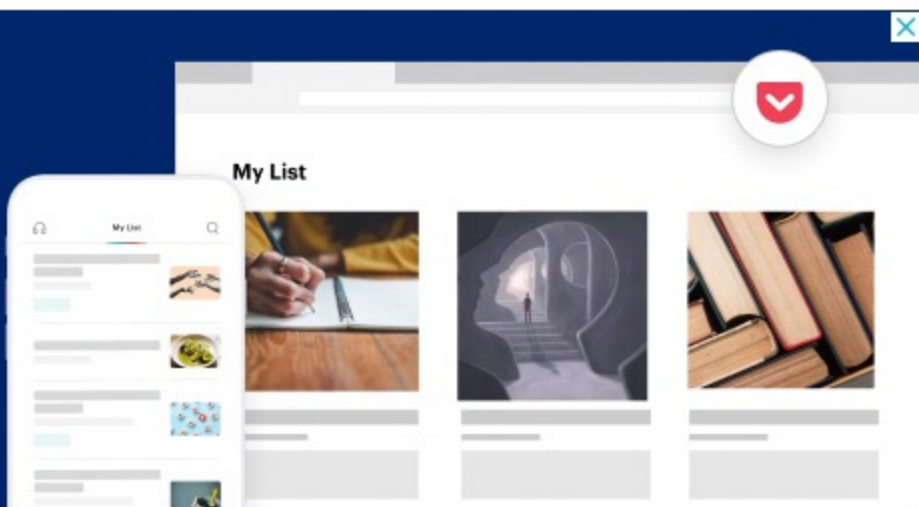




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THE WORLD

Former Syrian Defense Minister Reportedly Defects, Is Apparently Not Dead

BY JOSHUA KEATING

SEPT 04, 2013 • 12:36 PM



DAMASCUS, SYRIA: Chief of Syrian Army Ali Habib waits outside the Al-Shami hospital in Damascus on 13 October 2005.

Photo by LOUAI BESHARA/AFP/Getty Images

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A [Reuters](#) story this morning quotes Syrian opposition forces claiming that Gen. Ali Habib, who served as Syria's minister of defense from 2009-2011, has defected to Turkey:

A Gulf source told Reuters that Habib had defected on Tuesday evening, arriving at the Turkish frontier before midnight with two or three other people. He was then taken across the border in a convoy of vehicles. His companions were fellow military officers who supported his defection, the source said. They were believed to have also left [Syria](#) but there was no immediate confirmation of that.

The Reuters report follows a rumor that had been bubbling online for a couple of days, notably on the cantankerous Syrian Twitter account [The 47th](#). The story also seems to have been [reported](#) earlier by the Lebanese website *Ya Libnan*, which describes the defection—with a corroboration—as a prelude to a coup against Bashar al-Assad aimed at heading off U.S. intervention.

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That's probably just speculation, but Habib's defection still seems like a significant development. Habib was dismissed as defense minister in 2011, reportedly for health reasons, though [according](#) to journalist Hassan Hassan there were rumors that "he was sacked after refusing to shell the city of Hama without written orders." Habib was a prominent member of the president's Alawite religious sect and as Alastair Smith [noted on the blog](#) yesterday, Assad's future security depends largely on keeping his core Alawite supporters in line. In general, high-profile defections from Syria seemed to have slowed to a trickle lately and Habib would be the biggest one in months.

It's also notable since in 2011, there were widely circulated reports in the Israeli media based on Syrian opposition sources that Habib had been found dead. He later [went on TV](#) to deny the rumors. Welcome to the Syrian news cycle.

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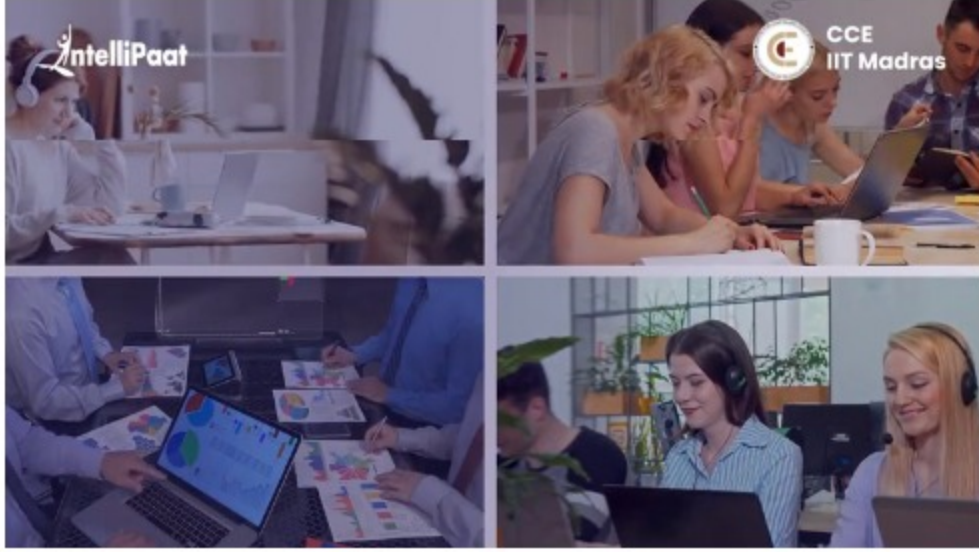


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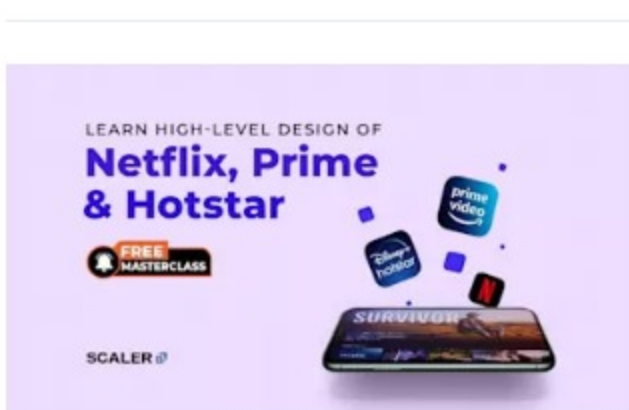


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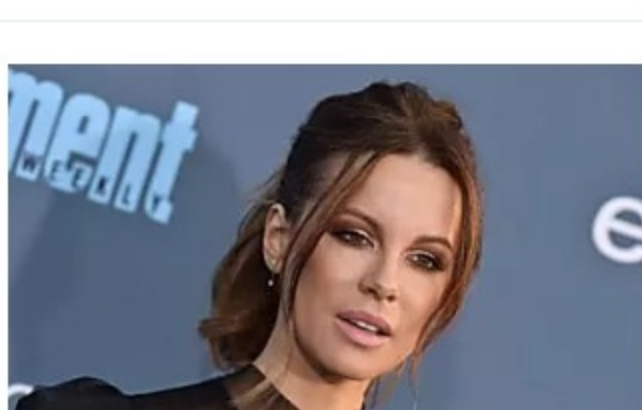
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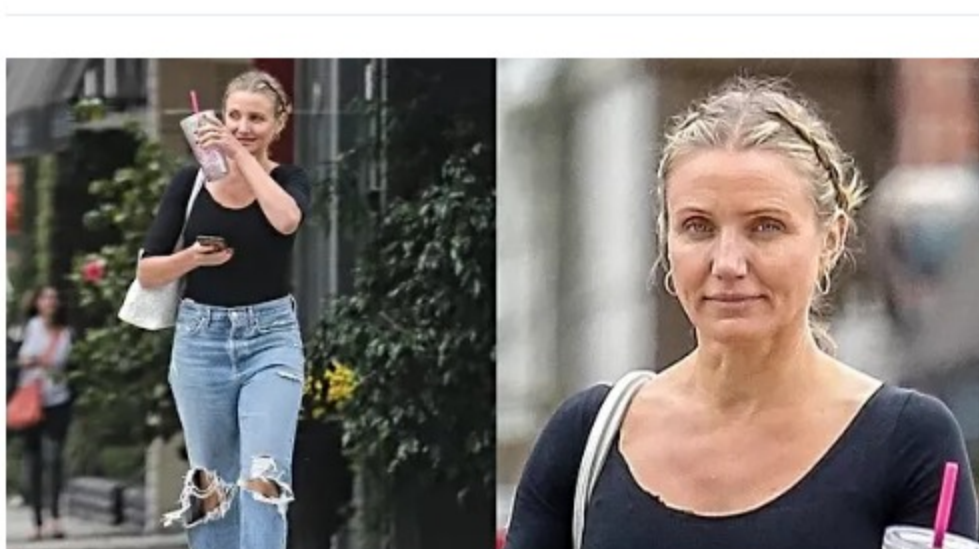
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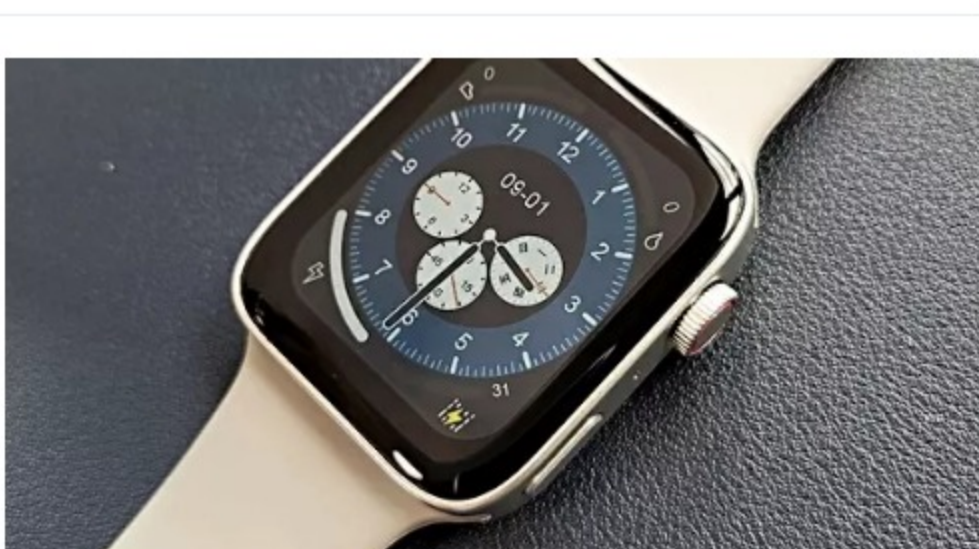
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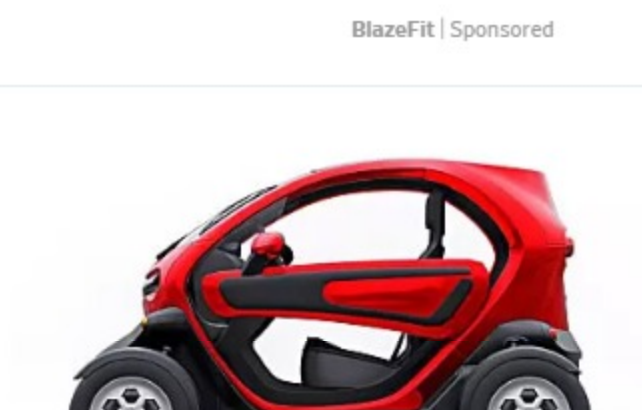
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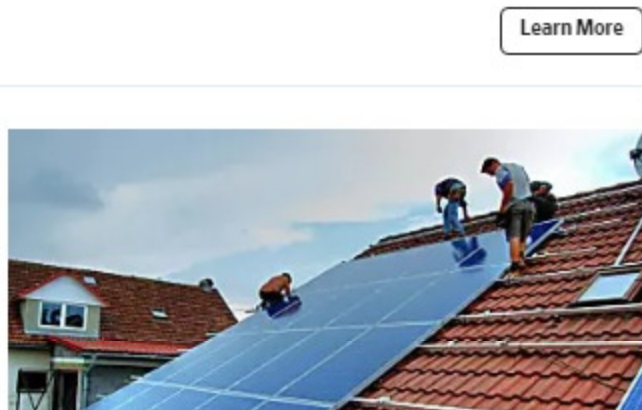
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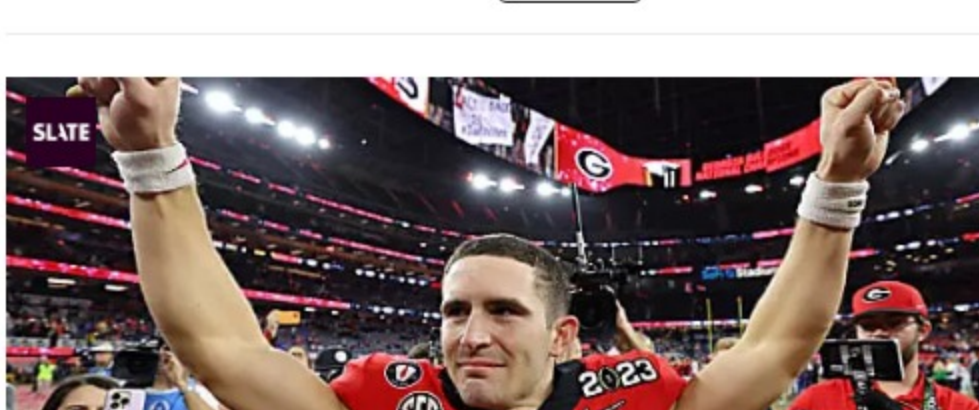
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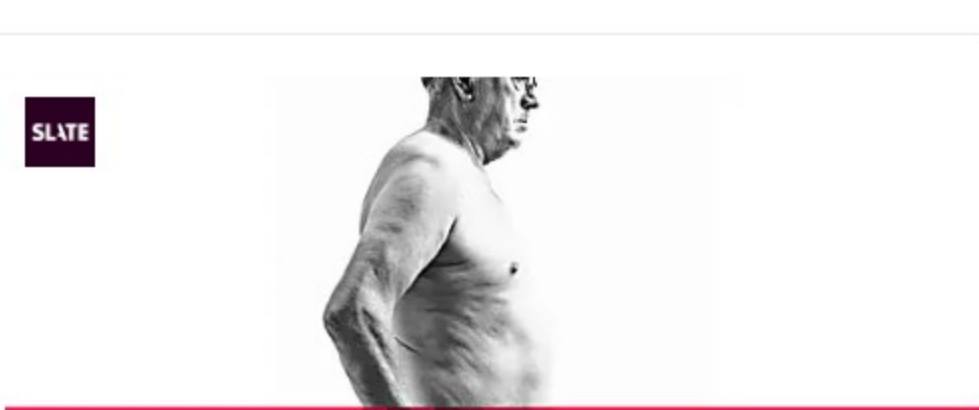
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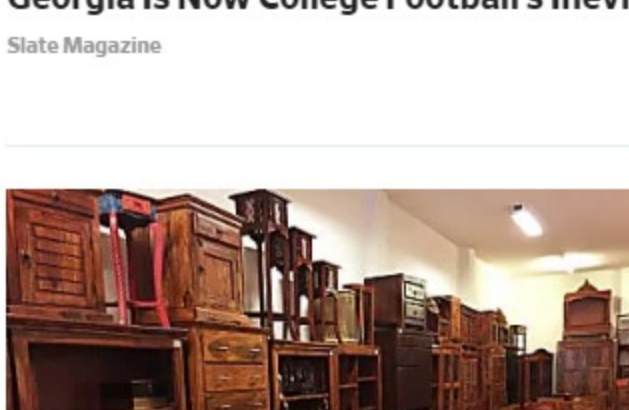
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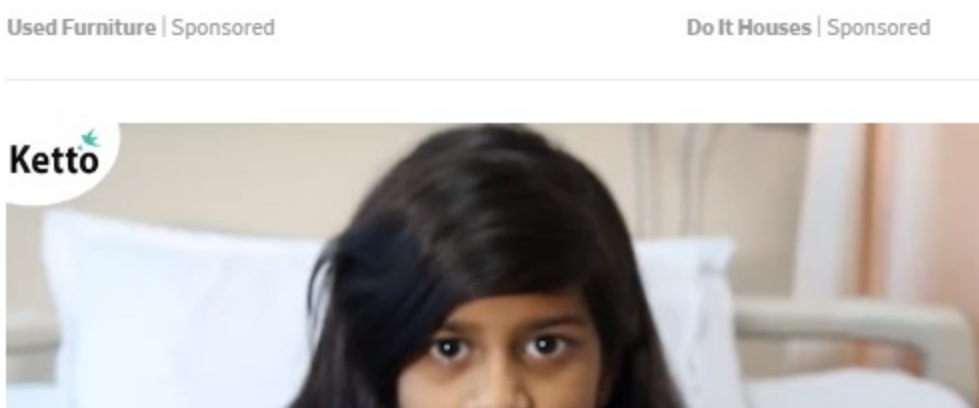
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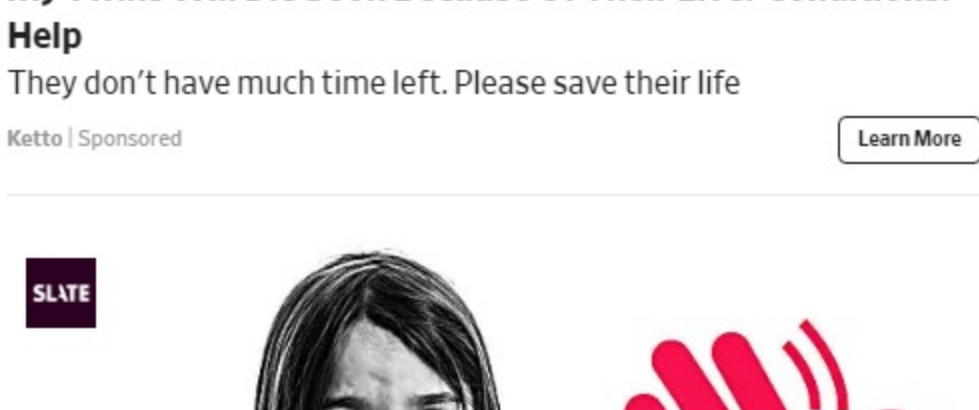


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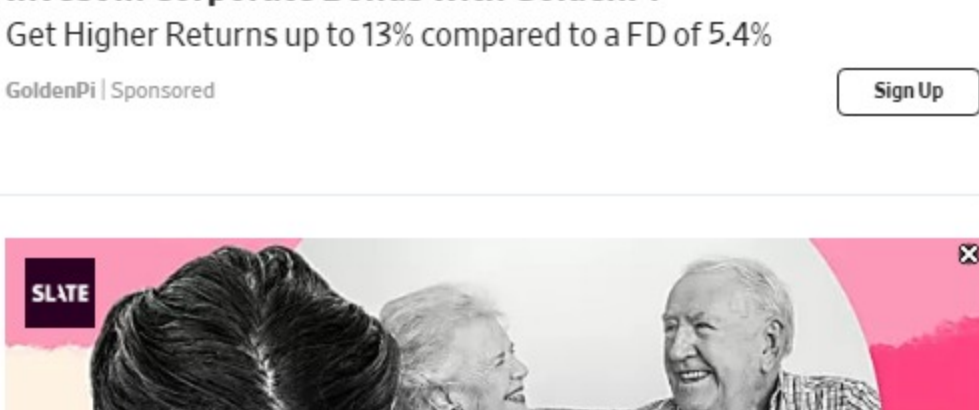
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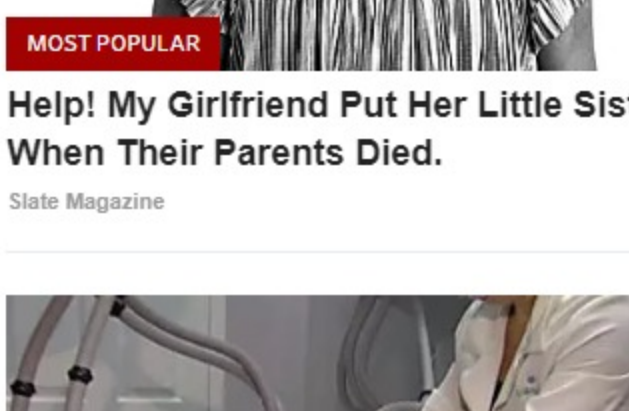
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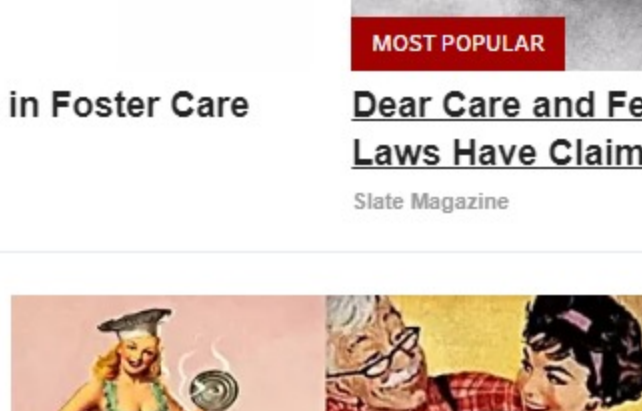
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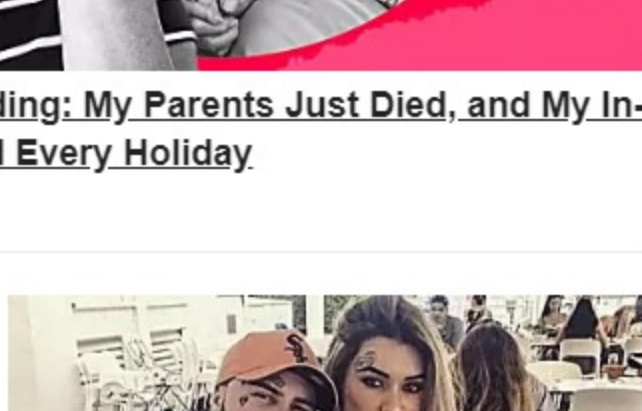
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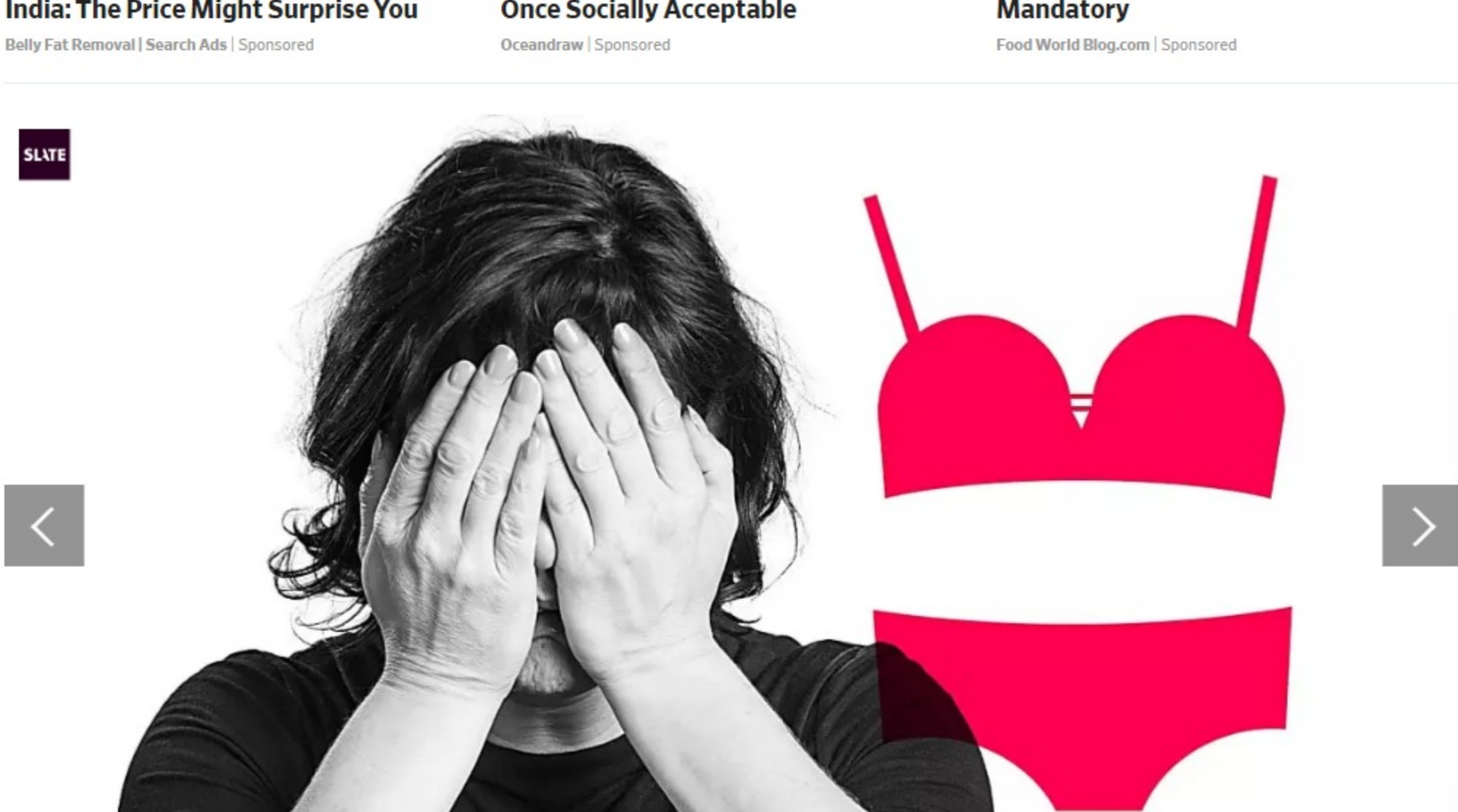
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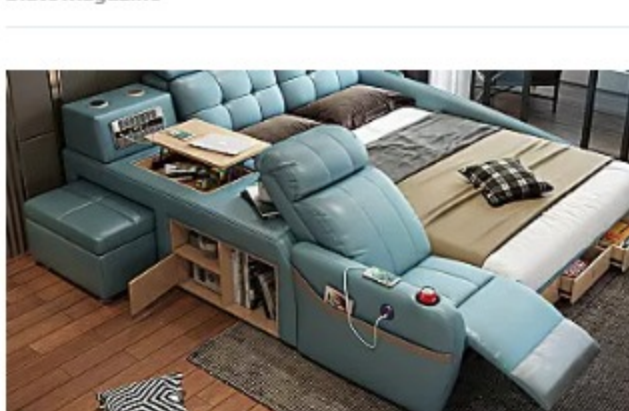
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