

Business

Al Mulla Automobiles Co and Kuwait Insurance Co sign mutual agreement

KIC will provide offerings to Mercedes-Benz new and certified cars customers

KUWAIT: Al Mulla Automobiles Co and Kuwait Insurance Company (KIC) have announced the launch of a comprehensive mutual agreement to provide motor insurance to Mercedes-Benz clients. This non-exclusive association aims to provide Mercedes-Benz customers with easy access to one of the leading insurance providers in Kuwait.

Imad Flayhan, Managing Director - Automotive Group- Al Mulla Group, stated: "We're delighted to have KIC as a preferred Insurance Service Provider for our Mercedes-Benz customers. Providing our customers with the best services and quality insurance products is a top priority for Al Mulla



Automobiles. This association with KIC enables our customers to avail the highest level of insurance services from our Preferred Insurance Service Provider. In addition to enhancing our customer's journey and providing them with a wide array of

insurance services. Al Mulla Automobiles Co. proudly welcomes its insurer of choice - Kuwait Insurance Co. and the variety of quality insurance offerings it provides to Mercedes-Benz customers in Kuwait."

Commenting on this occasion, Sami Sharif, Chief Executive Officer - Kuwait Insurance Company stated, "Today's association with Al Mulla Automobiles echoes our commitment to offer discerning automotive clientele an enjoyable, trustworthy and hassle-free ownership experience. With Al Mulla team we designed a comprehensive 'Premium' Motor Insurance product that responds to the needs of their distinguished clientele. Emanating from our val-

ued client-centric mentality, KIC will be physically present at the Mercedes-Benz showroom as well as the workshop to guide motorists properly and provide all necessary information and assistance, making even their claim experience streamlined and hassle-free."

For inquiries and more information about the latest Mercedes-Benz offers and services, customers can visit Al Mulla automobiles - Mercedes-Benz in Al Rai, Mercedes-Benz Boutique in The Avenues or call the customer center at 1887888, follow the account on Instagram @MercedesBenzKuwait, or visit the website at www.mercedes-benz-mena.com

Washing your clothes can create Arctic pollution

PARIS: Households in Europe and North America are flooding the oceans with plastic pollution simply by washing their clothes, scientists said Tuesday after research found the majority of microplastics in Arctic seawater were polyester fibers. Plastic particles have infiltrated even the most remote and seemingly-pristine regions of the planet. These tiny fragments have been discovered inside fish in the deepest recesses of the ocean-the Mariana Trench-peppering Arctic sea ice and blanketing the snows on the Pyrenees mountains between France and Spain.

But questions remain over exactly where this plastic contamination is coming from.

In the new study by the Ocean Wise conservation group and Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans, researchers sampled seawater from across the Arctic and found synthetic fibers made up around 92 percent of microplastic pollution.

Of this, around 73 percent was found to be polyester, resembling the dimensions and chemical identities of synthetic textiles-particularly clothing. "The striking conclusion here is that we now have strong evidence that homes in Europe and North America are directly polluting the Arctic with fibers from laundry (via wastewater discharge)," said lead author Peter Ross, of Ocean Wise and the University of British Columbia.

He said the mechanisms for this remain unclear, but added that ocean currents appear to play a major role in transporting the fibers northwards, while atmospheric systems may also contribute. "Plastics are all around us, and while it would be grossly unfair to specifically point our finger at textiles as the only source of micro plastics to the world's oceans, we nonetheless see a strong footprint of polyester fibers that are likely to be largely derived from clothing," he told AFP.

Washing machine to ocean

Researchers collected near-surface seawater samples along a 19,000-kilometer section from Tromsø in Norway to the North Pole, through the Canadian Arctic and into the Beaufort Sea, where they also analyzed some samples up to a depth of around 1,000 meters. "We found microplastic in all but one sample, underscoring the widespread distribution of this emerging pollutant in this remote region," said Ross. Researchers used microscopy and infrared analysis to identify and measure the microplastics, which they defined as shreds of plastic smaller than five millimeters.

With almost three times more microplastic particles found in the eastern Arctic compared to the west, the authors suggested that new polyester fibres could be being delivered to the east of the region by the Atlantic.

Ocean Wise has run tests on washing machines and estimates that a single item of clothing can release millions of fibres during a normal domestic wash. The organization has also warned that wastewater treatment plants are often not catching the plastic fibers, calculating that households in the United States and Canada could collectively release some 878 tons of microfibrils annually. "The textile sector can do much to design more sustainable clothing, including by designing clothes that shed less," said Ross, while governments could make sure wastewater treatment plants have installed technologies to remove microplastics and incentivize innovation. Households can also play their part by choosing products made with more environmentally friendly fabrics and installing lint traps on their washing machines, Ross added.

In 2019 a study published in Science Advances concluded that a large quantity of microplastic fragments and fibers are transported by winds into the Arctic region, and then hitch a ride Earthward in snowflakes. Several million tons of plastics also find their way each year directly into oceans, where they are broken down into microscopic bits over time. In the last two decades, the world has produced as much plastic as during the rest of history, and the industry is set to grow by four percent a year until 2025, according to a 2020 report by Grand View Research.—AFP

Pirate attacks surge in 2020: Watchdog

KUALA LUMPUR: Pirate attacks on ships worldwide jumped 20 percent last year driven by a record spate of kidnappings off West Africa, a maritime watchdog said yesterday, urging increased sea patrols.

A total of 195 incidents of piracy and armed robbery were reported, up from 162 in 2019, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) said in its annual report. Out of 135 sailors abducted globally last year, 130 of them were recorded in the Gulf of Guinea off West Africa—the highest ever number of crew members kidnapped in the region. The gulf stretches thousands of kilometers from Angola in the south to Senegal in the north, and its waters are considered among the world's most dangerous for piracy.

IMB director Michael Howlett said the surge in kidnappings showed "the increased capabilities of pirates in the Gulf of Guinea with more and more attacks taking place further from the coast". Pirates have shifted from hijacking tankers for oil to the more lucrative kidnapping of sailors for ransom in recent years, added Noel Choong, head of the Kuala Lumpur-based IMB piracy reporting center. Choong said the abductions were increasing at an "alarming rate" and appealed to West African countries to step up patrols.—AFP

Sales of electric vehicles surge in China

BEIJING: Sales of electric vehicles in China rose 10 percent last year, data showed yesterday, amid a post-pandemic economic recovery and a push to establish the world's largest auto market as a leader for green technology. Sales of new energy vehicles—including all-electric and hybrids—grew 10.9 percent from a year ago to 1.37 million vehicles in 2020, the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers said.

Total auto sales in China dropped 1.9 percent to 25.31 million vehicles, but the figure was "better than expected," the industry association said. Aggressive lockdowns to contain the Covid-19 virus hit the industry hard in the first quarter of 2020 but sales rebounded as Beijing brought the domestic outbreak under control. Investors have flooded into the electric vehicle sector as the Chinese government pushes for new energy vehicles to comprise 25 percent of car sales by 2025.—AFP

HK tracker fund makes U-turn on China investments

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's original stock market tracker fund said yesterday it would continue investing in companies listed by Washington as having links to China's military, backtracking on a decision it made this week. The announcement highlights how tension between the world's two biggest economies is causing headache for international firms in Hong Kong, which has long served as China's gateway to global markets. Outgoing US President Donald Trump issued an order in November banning Americans from investing in Chinese firms deemed to be supplying or supporting the country's military.

On Monday the Tracker Fund of Hong Kong (TraHK) — which has some US\$14 billion in assets—said it would comply with the order and recommend Americans should longer invest in the fund.



This file photo illustration picture taken in London shows the logos of Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft displayed on a mobile phone and a laptop screen. — AFP

Tech giants hope for US data privacy law

SAN FRANCISCO: Google, Twitter and Amazon are hopeful that Joe Biden's incoming administration in the United States will enact a federal digital data law, senior company officials said at CES, the annual electronics and technology show. "I think the stars are better aligned than ever in the past," Keith Enright, Google's chief data privacy officer, told a discussion Tuesday on trust and privacy. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which has applied since May 2018, has largely contributed to making consumers aware of the issues related to the data that they submit to large digital platforms on a daily basis. This European data rights charter influenced California, which has now had the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) for over a year.

"That tends to dramatically increase the chances that we can develop the political will at the federal level to do something, just to create a uniform rule of law so that companies know what the rules of the road are and individual users know what their rights and pro-

But on Wednesday the fund u-turned. "TraHK will resume investments in sanctioned entities that are constituent companies of the Hang Seng Index with effect from 14 January 2021," it said in a statement to Hong Kong's stock exchange. They would, however, advise Americans that it wasn't "appropriate" to invest. TraHK was set up by Hong Kong's government following the 1998 Asian financial crash and is the city's biggest exchange-traded fund.

It is run by the Asian arm of State Street Global Advisors, a massive US asset management firm.

Hong Kong-based firms are finding themselves acutely vulnerable to the crossfire of spiralling tensions and competing restrictions. Last year the US imposed sanctions on multiple Chinese and Hong Kong officials over Beijing's crackdown on democracy supporters in the city.

The restrictions bar financial institutions from doing any transactions with the sanctioned individuals.

At the same time, Beijing has imposed a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong which—among its many provisions—outlaws firms from complying with foreign sanctions regimes. The dichotomy has left international businesses fearful of being punished by both sides.—AFP

tections are," Enright said. Biden's government will have leeway to legislate, as the Democrats will be in control of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The incoming president will benefit from the experience of his deputy Kamala Harris, a former prosecutor in California, where the majority of the tech giants are located.

"There are more than 100 national data privacy laws in the world," said Anne Toth, director of Amazon's Alexa Trust. "We're dealing with a forever patchwork quilt but we're trying to minimize the differences." "The laws must be interoperable," added Damien Kieran, director of data privacy at Twitter.

"The federal government as it thinks about this, has to really understand the international future of this," he continued. "If we get this wrong, not to put too much weight on it, but I think it is this important, you increase the chances for that balkanization of things."

Silicon Valley has long been close to elected Democrats, but the relationship has deteriorated since the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and the scandal of Cambridge Analytica, a British firm that hijacked the personal data of tens of millions of Facebook users for political propaganda purposes.

Google is the subject of an anti-trust lawsuit by the Department of Justice and a coalition of American states. Its YouTube platform, like Facebook and Twitter, is in the crosshairs of government officials for their management of personal information.—AFP

Pandemic boosts profits at India's Infosys

MUMBAI: Indian software giant Infosys yesterday reported a 16.6 percent jump in quarterly net profits, boosted by a string of lucrative new deals and growing demand for digital services during the coronavirus pandemic. The Bangalore-headquartered firm said its net profit rose to 51.97 billion rupees (\$710 million) for the October-December quarter, up from 44.57 billion a year earlier.

The third quarter is traditionally a weak one for India's IT industry, but CEO Salil Parekh said new partnerships with top global companies such as Daimler and Rolls-Royce had helped to boost the firm's bottom line. Quarterly revenue at India's second-largest IT company climbed 12.3 percent to 259.27 billion rupees from a year ago.

India's software outsourcing industry has proved a rare bright spot for the beleaguered economy, with Infosys and rival Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) both offering employees salary hikes in 2020 even as the country faces a prolonged slowdown and high unemployment. "The resilience of Infosys has been severely tested over the past several quarters and I am delighted with our response marked by strong revenue performance, large deal wins, healthy operating metrics and continued low attrition," chief operating officer Pravin Rao said. Infosys was at the forefront of an outsourcing boom that saw the country become a back office to the world, as Western firms subcontracted work to a skilled English-speaking workforce.

Over 60 percent of the firm's revenue comes from North American markets. Its larger competitor TCS saw its quarterly profits climb more than seven percent last week, one of its strongest third quarter performances.

Infosys shares were up more than one percent in Mumbai ahead of the earnings.—AFP