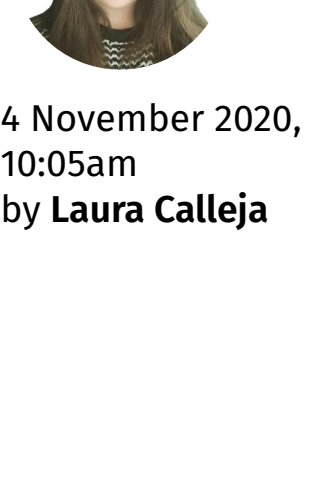
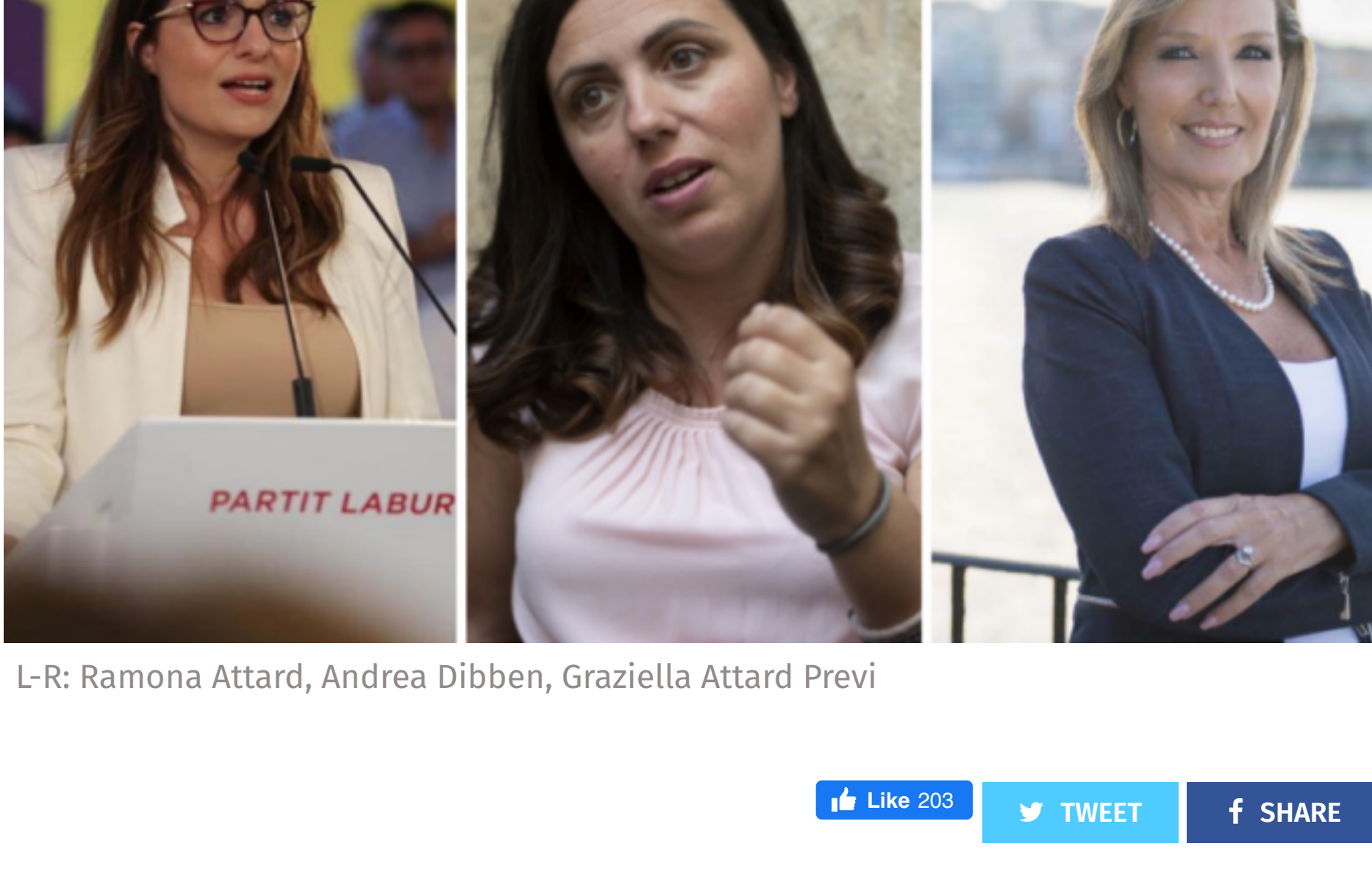


Women leaders call out reduced availability of morning-after pill

Politicians and activists have called out the morning-after pill's reduced availability in Malta



4 November 2020, 10:05am by Laura Calleja



L-R: Ramona Attard, Andrea Dibben, Graziella Attard Previ

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Pharmacies should not be refusing to sell emergency contraception because the morning-after pill is not abortive, the president of the Labour Party, Ramona Attard, told MaltaToday.

The reaction comes after this newspaper found that buying the morning-after pill in Gozo on Sunday, when pharmacies in Malta operate on a restricted roster, can be problematic. On two of the six Sundays surveyed by this newspaper in November and December, none of the two pharmacies open on the given days sell the emergency contraception.

This newspaper called up 120 individual pharmacies and posed as a client wanting to buy the morning-after pill: an average of 64% sell the morning-after pill, but that number falls on Sundays when a restricted amount of pharmacies are open.

READ MORE: We called 120 pharmacies: buying the morning-after pill on Sunday is an arduous task



"It is unacceptable that MAP is still inaccessible on Sunday, especially in Gozo," Attard said, pointing out that there was a limited timeframe when it came to the effectiveness of MAP, and therefore pharmacies not selling the pill affected the lives of women and girls who need it.

Commenting on the MaltaToday story, Attard said the report showed that many people were under the mistaken impression that it an abortive pill, and that further education was needed on the MAP. "The medicine authority itself has stated that the morning-after pill is not abortive, so I cannot understand why pharmacies are refusing to sell it," Attard said.

Attard said that she agreed with pharmacists that MAP was not a long-term solution – and that women should be informed about other forms of contraception were more beneficial.

Activist and social policy academic Andrea Dibben said the exercise showed that four years after women in Malta had successfully campaigned for emergency contraception to become licensed and available, there was still a serious issue in terms of access.

"It is reprehensible that women are being denied this essential service on a scientifically false premise that this contraception is abortifacient when all the medical evidence is clear that the products sold in Malta have no effect post-fertilization," she said.

"It is ironic that access to emergency contraception could prevent the need for abortion so thanks to these 'conscientious objectors', women may have to resort to illegal abortion if they become pregnant. It is also hypocritical if these pharmacies sell other hormonal contraceptives," Dibben said.

The situation at Mater Dei Hospital

Notably, MAP is not available at Mater Dei Hospital, even against payment. Since MAP was legalized in 2016, the health authorities have said MAP would be made available at Mater Dei however four years on, that is still not the case.

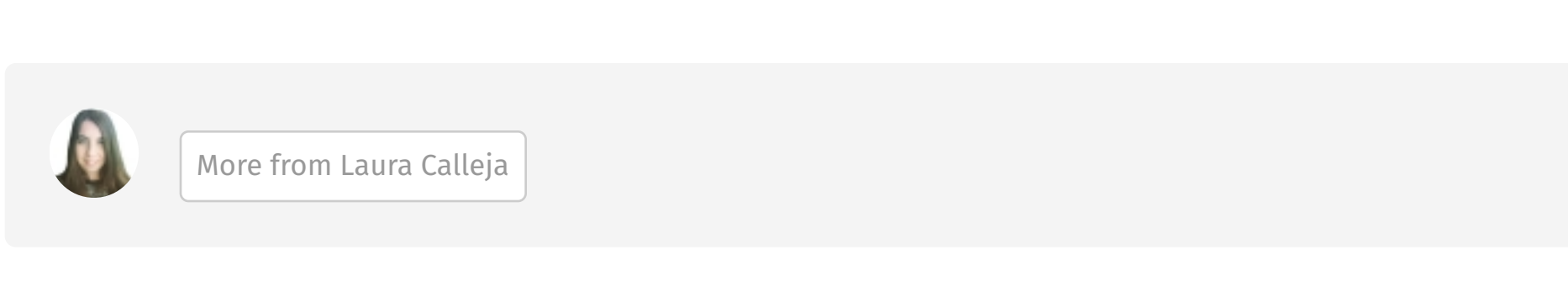
"The morning after pill should also be available at Mater Dei Hospital as well as Gozo General Hospital. This is a good place to start... it is not justifiable that after four years, women still face these hurdles, we need to remedy this, as soon as possible," Attard said.

The PN's president of its civil liberties forum, Graziella Attard Previ, said whilst the MAP should be made available at Mater Dei Hospital for emergency cases, "we urge the competent authorities to seek advice from the medical experts and professionals who direct the Medicines Approval Section to reach an informed decision, including whether this could be made available against payment or free of charge."

Dibben said that the lack of access at Mater Dei even for rape victims is a situation that has reached a stage of "beyond ridiculous."

"Time and again the Ministry of Health has promised better access to contraception, better sexual health services, and better policies yet women in Malta remain short-changed, all this in a country with a total abortion ban," she said.

Dibben said that all of Europe had its eyes on Poland but that the situation in Malta merited attention. "Polish women are heroes, however, in the meantime, let's not forget that in Malta the situation is even more dire... It's just sad."

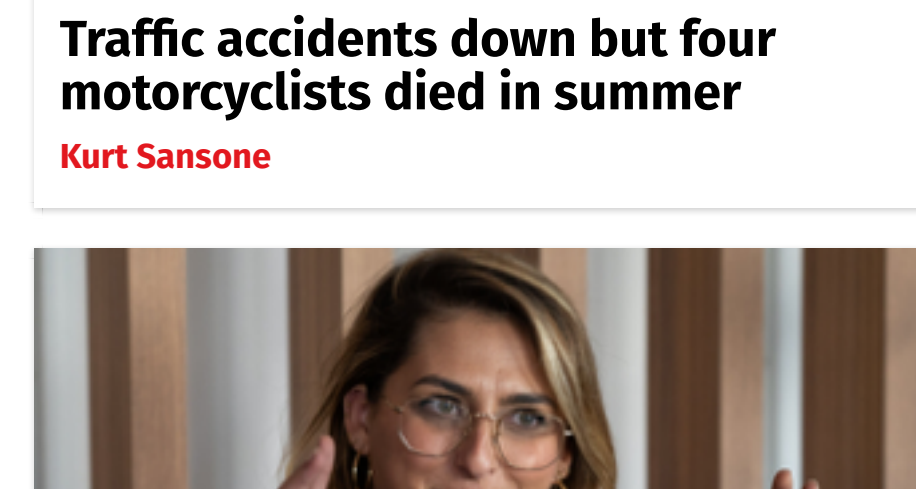


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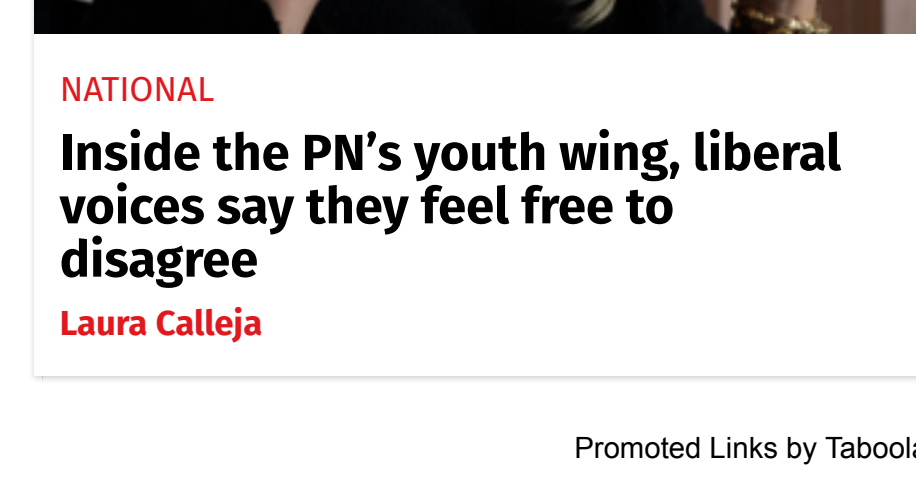
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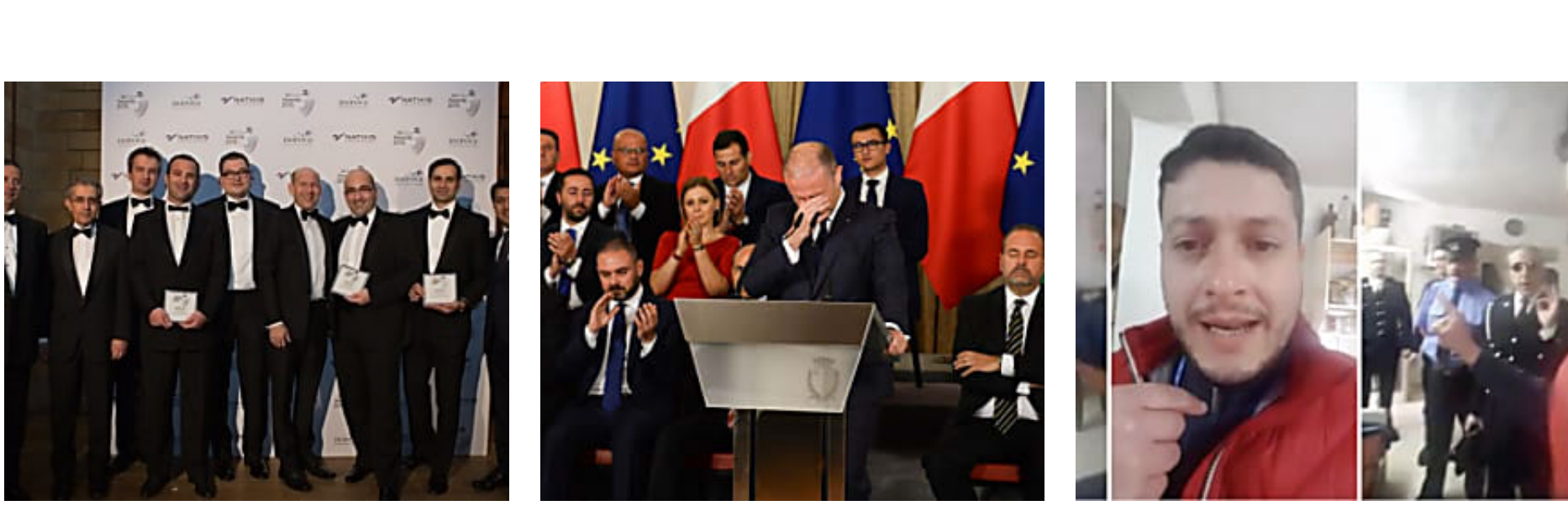
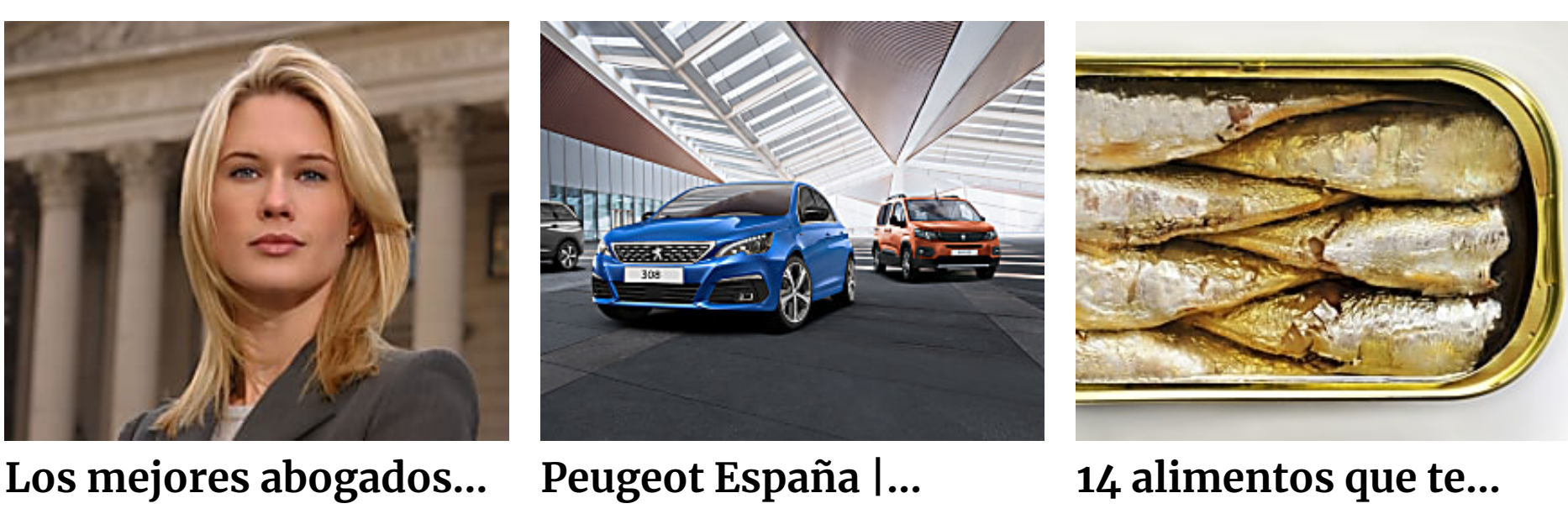
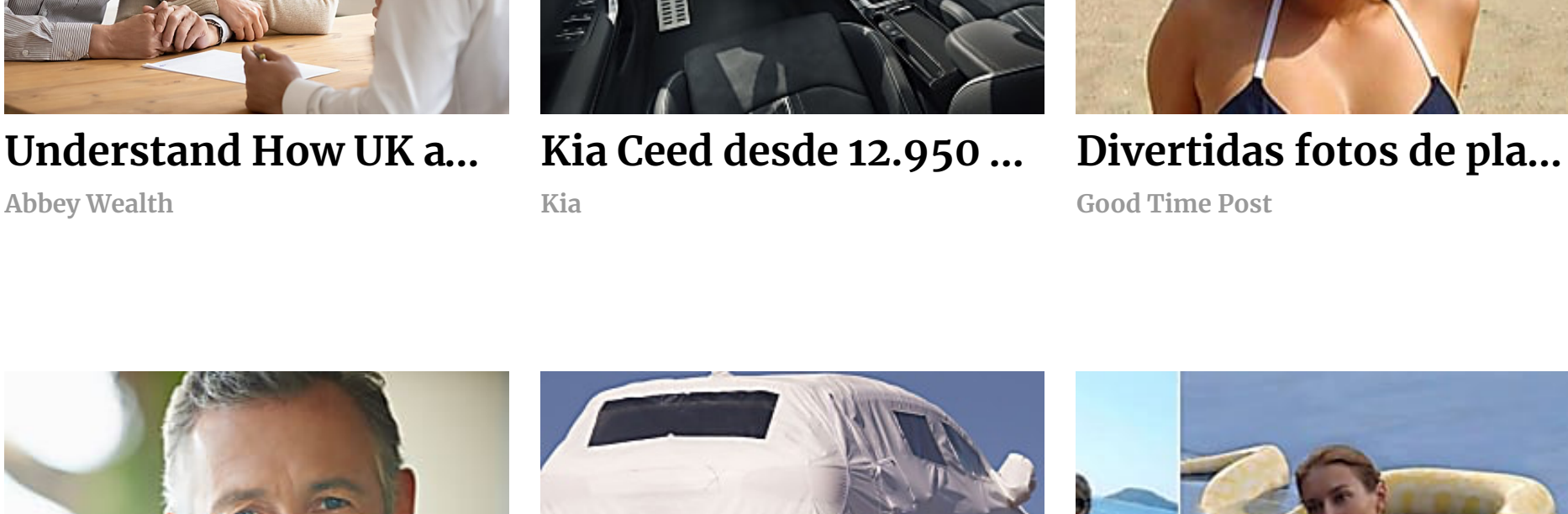


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