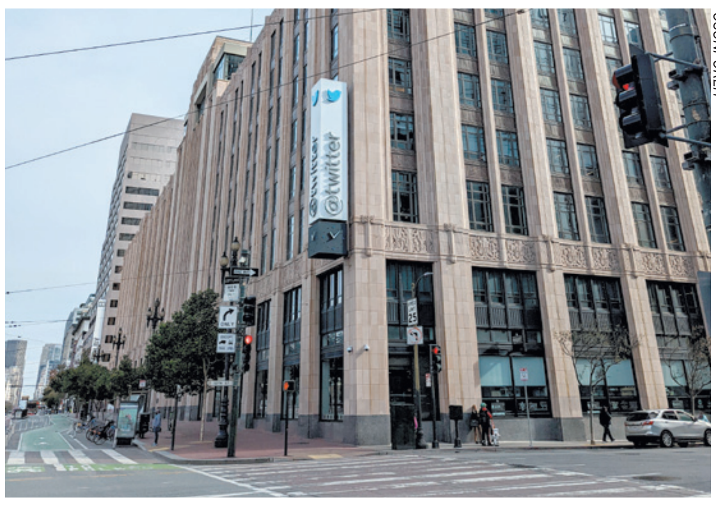

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TWITTER headquarters in San Francisco

Elon Musk-owned Twitter further cuts staff overseeing global content moderation

TWITTER, Inc. made further staff cuts in the trust and safety team handling global content moderation and in the unit related to hate speech and harassment, Bloomberg news reported on Saturday.

At least a dozen more cuts on Friday night affected workers in the company's Dublin and Singapore offices, the report said, citing people familiar with the matter.

Those laid off at the social media platform owned by Elon Musk include Nur Azhar Bin Ayob, a relatively recent hire as head of site integrity for the Asia-Pacific region, and Analuisa Dominguez, Twitter's senior director of revenue policy, Bloomberg reported.

Workers on teams handling policy on misinformation, global appeals and state media on the platform were also eliminated, the report added.

Twitter's vice president of trust and safety, Ella Irwin, confirmed to Reuters that Twitter made some cuts in the trust and safety team on Friday night but did not give details. "We have thousands of people within Trust and Safety who work content moderation and have not made cuts to the teams that do that work daily," she said via email. Some of the cuts, she added, were in areas that lacked sufficient volume going forward or where it made sense to consolidate.

Twitter laid off roughly 3,700 employees in early November in a cost-cutting measure by Mr. Musk, and hundreds more subsequently resigned.

The company was also hit with a lawsuit last month that claimed the social media company disproportionately targeted female employees in layoffs. — ***Reuters***

Ant Group founder Jack Ma to give up control in key revamp

SHANGHAI/HONG KONG — Ant Group's founder Jack Ma will give up control of the Chinese fintech giant in an overhaul that seeks to draw a line under a regulatory crackdown that was triggered soon after its mammoth stock market debut was scuppered two years ago.

Ant's $37-billion initial public offering (IPO), which would have been the world's largest, was canceled at the last minute in November 2020, leading to a forced restructuring of the financial technology firm and speculation the Chinese billionaire would have to cede control.

While some analysts have said a relinquishing of control could clear the way for the company to revive its IPO, the changes announced by the group on Saturday, however, are likely to result in a further delay due to listing regulations.

China's domestic A-share market requires companies to wait three years after a change in control to list. The wait is two years on Shanghai's Nasdaq-style STAR market, and one year in Hong Kong.

A former English teacher, Mr. Ma previously possessed more than 50% of voting rights at Ant but the changes will mean that his share falls to 6.2%, according to Reuters calculations.

Mr. Ma only owns a 10% stake in Ant, an affiliate of e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. 9988.HK, but has exercised control over the company through related entities, according to Ant's IPO prospectus filed with the exchanges in 2020.

Hangzhou Yunbo, an investment vehicle for Mr. Ma, had control over two other entities that own a combined 50.5% stake of Ant, the prospectus showed.

Mr. Ma's ceding of control comes as Ant is nearing the completion of its two-year regulatory-driven restructuring, with Chinese authorities poised to impose a fine of more than $1 billion on the firm, Reuters reported in November.

The expected penalty is part of Beijing's sweeping and unprecedented crackdown on the country's technology titans over the past two years that has sliced hundreds of billions of dollars off their values and shrunk revenues and profits.

But Chinese authorities have in recent months softened their tone on the tech crackdown and efforts to bolster a $17-trillion economy that has been badly hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"With the Chinese economy in a very febrile state, the government is looking to signal its commitment to growth, and the tech, private sectors are key to that as we know," said Duncan Clark, chairman of investment advisory firm BDA China.

"At least Ant investors can (now) have some timetable for an exit after a long period of uncertainty," said Clark, who is also an author of a book on Alibaba and Mr. Ma.

REGULATORY SCRUTINY

Ant operates China's ubiquitous mobile payment app Alipay, the world's largest, which has more than 1 billion users.

Ant, whose businesses also span consumer lending and insurance products distribution, said Mr. Ma and nine of its other major shareholders had agreed to no longer act in concert when exercising voting rights, and would only vote independently.

It added that the shareholders' economic interests in Ant will not change as a result of the adjustments.

Ant also said it would add a fifth independent director to its board so that independent directors will comprise a majority of the company's board. It currently has eight board directors.

"As a result, there will no longer be a situation where a direct or indirect shareholder will have sole or joint control over Ant Group," it said in its statement.

Reuters reported in April 2021 that Ant was exploring options for Mr. Ma, one of China's most successful and influential businessmen, to divest his stake in Ant and give up control.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported in July last year, citing unnamed sources, that Mr. Ma could cede control by transferring some of his voting power to Ant officials including Chief Executive Officer Eric Jing.

Ant's market listing in Hong Kong and Shanghai was derailed days after Mr. Ma publicly criticized regulators in a speech in October 2020. Since then, his sprawling empire has been under regulatory scrutiny and going through a restructuring.

Once outspoken, Mr. Ma has largely remained out of public view since the regulatory crackdown that has reined in the country's technology giants and did away with a *laissez-faire* approach that drove breakneck growth.

"Jack Ma's departure from Ant Financial, a company he founded, shows the determination of the Chinese leadership to reduce the influence of large private investors," said Andrew Collier, managing director of Orient Capital Research.

"This trend will continue the erosion of the most productive parts of the Chinese economy."

As Chinese regulators frown on monopolies and unfair competition, Ant and Alibaba have been untangling their operations from each other and independently seeking new business, Reuters reported last year.

Ant said on Saturday that its management would no longer serve in the Alibaba Partnership a body that can nominate the majority of the e-commerce giant's board, affirming a change that started mid-last year. — ***Reuters***

Policy,
from S1/1

"I don't see anything wrong with this decision should it be pursued because the economy seems to have demonstrated its resiliency last year, and is expected to replicate it this year with at least 6-6.5% GDP (gross domestic product) growth," he said.

Despite rising rates, GDP expanded by 7.6% in the third quarter, bringing the nine-month average to 7.7%. The government expects GDP to have grown by 6.5-7.5% in 2022, and targets 6-7% growth in 2023.

The Philippine Statistics Authority is scheduled to release the fourth-quarter 2022 GDP data on Jan. 26.

"What is more urgent now is to tame inflation because otherwise, it can also restrain economic growth through lower private consumption and investment. What is bothersome is the possibility of getting inflation expectations more entrenched if disinflation takes more time to execute," Mr. Guinigundo said.

He noted core inflation continued to accelerate in December, which may reflect significant demand — the target of monetary policy.

Core inflation, which excludes food and fuel volatile prices, quickened to 6.9% in December from 6.5% in November, marking the fastest print since 7.2% in November 2008. Year to date, core inflation averaged 3.9%.

The pace of the US Federal Reserve's policy tightening remains a key consideration for the BSP this year.

"For (2023), we expect BSP to also take its cue from the Fed with rate hikes likely to persist in the first half of the year," ING Bank N.V. Manila Senior Economist Nicholas Antonio T. Mapa said in an e-mail.

"If the Fed carries out its pivot, the BSP will be able to do its own pivot with a pause in the second quarter of 2023 and rate cuts in the second half next year," Mr. Mapa added.

The US Federal Reserve has delivered 425 bps of cumulative rate hikes in 2022, which brought its own policy rate to 4.25-4.5% in order to curb inflation.

"I think BSP will still hike but at a lesser magnitude," Sun Life Investment Management and Trust Co. economist Patrick M. Ella said in an e-mail.

Mr. Ella said the BSP may raise borrowing costs by 25 bps more this year, and pause rate hikes by mid-2023.

"To be honest, financial institutions can adjust to the elevated rate environment because the consumer can absorb these and 2022 experience shows that," he added.

The Monetary Board is scheduled to meet on Feb. 16 for its first policy meeting this year.

MONETARY POLICY LAG

Mr. Medalla in December said the central bank's last 50-bp rate increase may reduce GDP by about 7 bps in 2023, and by 19 bps in 2024 due to the lagged impact of policy tightening.

"If you're only looking at one rate increase, it's not that big. Of course, we increased policy rates from 2% to 5.5%, or by 350 bps, so you multiply these numbers by seven," Mr. Medalla had said in a mix of English and Tagalog.

The BSP chief added that this is why the International Monetary Fund (IMF) gave a 5% growth forecast for the Philippines this year, significantly below the economic managers' 6-7% target.

"But in our view, it's more important for the public to bring down inflation. High inflation will hurt people more than low GDP growth," Mr. Medalla said.

With its 350-bp cumulative rate hikes, the BSP has arrested inflationary expectations and managed the volatility in the foreign exchange market, Ms. Velasquez earlier said in an interview with One News.

The local unit closed at P55.755 versus the greenback on Dec. 29, 2022, weakening by P4.755 or 8.52% from its P51 close on Dec. 31, 2021. Still, the peso has strengthened from its record-low close of P59 in October.

"The total effect should happen in 12-18 months. So, since we had (our first rate hike) in May, you'd expect it in 2023, 2024 for the full effect of the monetary policy," she said.

In an earlier e-mail, Ms. Velasquez said that in theory, higher interest rates will discourage people from taking out loans.

"With less money at their disposal, consumers will demand less goods and services while businesses may be forced to put off expansion and hiring plans and reduce capital expenditures," she said.

"Less consumer demand, capital assets, and labor inputs will then force firms to produce less goods and services. With output lower than before, economic growth would slow and could go into negative territory, especially if the fall in output is widespread across the economy," she added.

Ms. Velasquez expects economic growth to slow to 5.5-6% this year.

Philippine National Bank economist Alvin Joseph A. Arogo said he sees GDP growing at a slower rate of 5.5% in 2023.

"This is because the purchasing power of consumers is likely to be affected by high inflation, especially as pandemic savings are used up. Moreover, capital formation would likely slow down with the higher interest rates, while government expenditures would likely increase minimally as indicated in the national budget that was recently ratified by Congress," Mr. Arogo said in an e-mail.

Maybank Investment Bank Chief Economist Suhaimi Bin Ilias also sees GDP growth easing to 5.5% this year, from a projected 7.3% in 2022.

"Any further rate hikes will push BSP monetary policy deeper into restrictive (territory), some that will be detrimental to GDP growth," he said in an e-mail.

LOOKING BACK

In 2022, the BSP exited its easy monetary policy strategy that was earlier done to support the pandemic-hit economy in 2020.

Pantheon Chief Emerging Asia Economist Miguel Chanco said the change in the BSP's leadership sparked a big shift in policy, as it went from former BSP Governor Benjamin E. Diokno's "conservative hand" to Mr. Medalla's more hawkish tone.

"Our general view is that the rate hiking cycle was overly aggressive, partly because it's clear from the data that the economy's relative strength this year is based on temporary factors and the same can be said about the upsurge in inflation," Mr. Chanco said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mapa lauded Mr. Medalla's policy decisions after taking over, as he was faced with the peso's depreciation against a strong dollar while trying to control price pressures at the same time.

"With the economic data report in hand, Medalla did what few would dare carry out: an emergency meeting as his first act as governor," Mr. Mapa said.

The BSP unexpectedly hiked borrowing costs by 75 bps in July, its biggest rate hike ever, following two 25-bp rate increase each in May and June. This was also the BSP's first off-cycle move since April 16, 2020, when it cut rates by 50 bps to 2.75% to support the economy.

"A short four months later, the peso has steadied considerably (thanks in part to fading dollar strength) while previously frayed market sentiment has been steadied to close out the year," Mr. Mapa said.

"The next big questions for (2023) would be who will take up the mantle of BSP governor after Medalla retires? July 2023 coincides with the projected Fed pivot and the choice of BSP governor will determine how BSP will react to the potential Fed rate cuts in the second half of the year," he added.

Colegio de San Juan de Letran Graduate School Associate Professor Emmanuel J. Lopez said the BSP's policy decisions for the last three quarters in 2022 has brought "mixed effects" to the economy.

"On one hand, although it is meant to douse cold water on the consumer's buying spree and meant to control consumer appetite and at the same time discourage investment spending by way of borrowing, this in effect discourages employment and therefore will increase unemployment," Mr. Lopez said.

"Although currently, we are back to pre-pandemic status of 95% employment, if we translate 5% unemployed people, that is still equivalent to approximately 3 million people without work," he added.

According to the latest data from the statistics agency, employment rate rose to 95.8% in November, from 95.5% in October and 93.5% in the same month a year ago.

Meanwhile, the unemployment rate eased to 4.2% in November — the lowest in over 17 years. This is equivalent to 2.177 million unemployed Filipinos in November, lower than the 2.241 million in the prior month.

US Trustee files objection to FTX's planned asset sales

A US Trustee filed an objection on Saturday to plans by bankrupt crypto exchange FTX to sell its digital currency futures and clearinghouse LedgerX, as well as units in Japan and Europe, according to a court filing.

FTX filed for bankruptcy protection in November and said last month it planned to sell its LedgerX, Embed, FTX Japan and FTX Europe businesses. On Tuesday, FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried pleaded not guilty to criminal charges that he cheated investors and caused billions of dollars in losses, in what prosecutors have called an "epic" fraud.

The filing by US Trustee Andrew Vara called for an independent investigation before the sale of the units, arguing that the companies may have information related to FTX's bankruptcy.

"The sale of potentially valuable causes of action against the Debtors' directors, officers and employees, or any other person or entity, should not be permitted until there has been a full and independent investigation into all persons and entities that may have been involved in any malfeasance, negligence or other actionable conduct," the filing said. — ***Reuters***

PHILIPPINE PORTS AUTHORITY RECEIVED JAN 04 2023 Time: 13:11 By: Records and Communications Division, ASD

PHILIPPINE PORTS AUTHORITY

JAN 0 3 2023

PPA ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 01 - 2023

TO : All Port Managers
Others Concerned

SUBJECT : ISSUANCE OF HOLDOVER AUTHORITY (HOA) FOR THE CONTINUOUS PROVISION OF CARGO HANDLING (CH), PASSENGER TERMINAL BUILDING (PTB) AND ROLL-ON/ROLL-OFF (RORO) SERVICES AT PORTS UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF THE PHILIPPINE PORTS AUTHORITY (PPA)

Pursuant to PPA Board Resolution No. 3181 dated December 15, 2022, and in order to ensure continuous provision of CH, PTB and RORO services at the ports under PPA's administrative jurisdiction, a Holdover Authority (HOA) may be issued to CH Operator, PTB Operator and RORO Service Provider with expired or due to expire Contract or HOA after December 2022.

The CH Service Providers, PTB Operators, and RORO Service Providers shall file their letter of intent for the issuance of HOA at least two (2) months prior to the expiration thereof.

For CH Services, the issuance of the HOA shall be subject to compliance with the following conditions:

1. CH Operator has no outstanding financial obligation with PPA;
2. CH Operator has submitted proof of an updated Portworkers Retirement and Separation Fund (PRSF) with attached Actuarial Computation;
3. CH Operator has complied with the requirements of SSS, Philhealth, DOLE Certification of No Pending Case with Labor; and
4. CH Operator shall have no pending case against PPA.

For PTB and RORO Services, the issuance of HOA shall be subject to compliance with the following conditions:

1. PTB Operator or RORO Service Provider has no outstanding financial obligation with PPA;
2. PTB Operator or RORO Service Provider has complied with the requirements of SSS, Philhealth, DOLE Certification of No Pending Case with Labor; and
3. PTB Operator or RORO Service Provider shall have no pending case against PPA.

The HOA shall be valid for one (1) year or until a new Contract and Notice to Proceed are concluded in accordance with PPA Administrative Order No. 12-2018, entitled "Guidelines for the Selection and Award of Contract under the Port Terminal Management Regulatory Framework (PTMRF)," whichever is earlier, unless otherwise revoked.

The General Manager shall be the signatory to the HOA to be issued.

All other issuances or any of the provisions inconsistent herewith are deemed amended and/or revoked.

This Order shall take effect immediately upon publication once in any newspaper of general circulation and a copy filed with the University of the Philippines Law Center.

JAY DANIEL R. SANTIAGO
General Manager