
TWITTER headquarters in San Francisco
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Twitter lays off 200 more workers amid revenue fall

TWITTER, INC. has laid off at least 200 employees, or about 10% of its workforce, the *New York Times* reported late on Sunday, in its latest round of job cuts since Elon Musk took over the microblogging site last October.

The layoffs on Saturday night impacted product managers, data scientists and engineers who worked on machine learning and site reliability, which helps keep Twitter's various features online, the *NYT* report said, citing people familiar with the matter.

Twitter did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

The company has a headcount of about 2,300 active employees, according to Mr. Musk last month.

The latest job cuts follow a mass layoff in early November, when Twitter laid off about 3,700 employees in a cost-cutting measure by Mr. Musk, who had acquired the company for $44 billion.

Mr. Musk said in November that the service was experiencing a "massive drop in revenue" as advertisers pulled spending amid concerns about content moderation.

Twitter recently started sharing revenue from advertisements with some of its content creators.

Earlier in the day, The Information reported that the social media platform laid off dozens of employees on Saturday, aiming to offset a plunge in revenue. — ***Reuters***

Big Tech 'fair share' debate set to rule Barcelona mobile meet

BARCELONA — A clash between Big Tech and European Union (EU) telecoms firms over who will underwrite network infrastructure is set to dominate discussion at the world's largest telecoms conference this week.

More than 80,000 people, including tech executives, innovators, and regulators, are set to descend on this year's Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona.

EU industry chief Thierry Breton on Thursday launched a 12-week consultation on its "fair share" proposals, under which Big Tech platforms would bear more of the costs of the systems which give them access to consumers.

Representatives from companies including Alphabet, Meta and Netflix are expected to use the conference as a platform to push back against the EU proposals.

Content providers like Netflix, which has arranged for its CEO Greg Peters to meet with Mr. Breton at the conference, argue their firms already invest heavily in infrastructure.

They say that paying out additional fees will detract from investment in products that benefit consumers.

By contrast, Deutsche Telekom, Orange, Telefonica and Telecom Italia have been actively lobbying for Big Tech to pay the fees.

GSMA, an association representing more than 750 mobile operators and the organizing body behind MWC, has been at the forefront of the debate.

"This discussion around 'fair share,' or what we sometimes call the 'investment gap,' is going to be a threshold question," said John Giusti, GSMA's chief regulatory officer.

Critics of the fair share or "SPNP" (Sending Party Network Pays) model have warned the so-called "traffic tax" could lead content-driven platforms to route their services via ISPs (internet service providers) outside of the EU.

Orange told Reuters the telecoms industry was not asking for special privileges in its demands. A spokesperson said the EU's consultation was a "positive first sign" of a debate starting.

"We argue for a framework that will facilitate a fair and equitable commercial relationship that recognizes a direct contribution by tech giants to network costs," they said.

Regulations will, however, be difficult to implement and enforce, said Shahid Ahmed, executive vice president at NTT and an adviser to the US Federal Communications Commission.

"We saw something very similar — the whole net neutrality debate — attempted in the US," he said.

The MWC, which begins on Monday, will also see new product launches from companies including Huawei, Xiaomi, HMD Global, Honor, and RealMe.

Other hot topics include the 5G adoption rate, which has disappointed some executives, and the potential uses of generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems like OpenAI's ChatGPT.

"Everything on the floor of MWC is about looking to the future," Mr. Guisti said. — ***Reuters***

Iran rial plunges to new lows amid unrest, international isolation

DUBAI — Iran's currency fell to a record low against the US dollar on the unofficial market on Sunday, amid the country's increasing isolation over its disputed nuclear program, human rights violations and the supply of drones to Russia.

The US dollar was fetching as much as 601,500 rials on Iran's unofficial market on Sunday, compared with 575,000 on the previous day and 540,000 on Friday, according to foreign exchange site *Bonbast.com*.

Iranian authorities have blamed the currency's fall on "the enemies' plot" to destabilize the Islamic Republic after months of unrest sparked by the death in custody of a young woman on Sept. 16.

The rial has lost nearly half of its value since the start of nationwide protests, the boldest challenge to theocratic rule since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

With protests in the Sunni-populated areas of Iran persisting, demonstrations in other parts of the country have waned in the past few weeks amid the state's harsh crackdown on protests.

The clerical leaders fear economic misery could ignite more protests when Iran faces mounting Western pressure over issues ranging from "brutal" clampdown on unrest, its disputed nuclear program and the war in Ukraine, where Western states say Russia has used Iranian drones.

Iran denies supplying drones to Russia for use in the Ukraine war.

The decreasing likelihood of salvaging Tehran's 2015 nuclear pact with world powers amid stalled talks since last year could also mean that crippling economic sanctions re-imposed by Washington when it ditched the pact in 2018 will continue to weigh on Iran's economy.

Faced with the prospect of further economic hardship, Iranians have been turning to dollars and other hard currencies or gold to protect their savings amid an inflation above 53% and rising prices.

To calm the market and ease demand for dollars, the central bank on Saturday lifted a ban on private exchange shops selling hard currencies. — ***Reuters***

Union Pacific CEO to step down as hedge fund presses for change

US RAILROAD Union Pacific Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Lance Fritz said on Sunday he would step down this year to make way for new leadership, after hedge fund Soroban Capital Partners called for him to be replaced.

Union Pacific said it expected to name a successor this year and Mr. Fritz said he looked forward to working with the board to find a new CEO.

Soroban Capital in a letter on Sunday called for Mr. Fritz to be replaced, saying he had lost the confidence of shareholders, employees, customers, and regulators.

Soroban founder Eric Mandelblatt said in the letter new leadership could create significant shareholder value.

The hedge fund said it had a "long-held view that current management is not capable of driving strong operating performance" and saw "a heightened risk of permanent damage to the franchise if left unaddressed."

Soroban urged Union Pacific to consider former Chief Operating Officer Jim Vena as a possible replacement for Mr. Fritz, saying "no internal candidates are remotely as qualified."

The hedge fund, which said it owns about a $1.6-billion stake in Union Pacific, said a change in leadership could generate about $18 of earnings per share in 2025. — ***Reuters***

RRR,
from S1/1

The BSP wants 70% of Filipino adults to have a formal financial account by this year. It also wants digital payments to make up 50% of all transactions both in volume and value.

Based on the latest central bank data, banked adults made up 56% of the total population in 2021 from just 29% in 2019.

The share of digital payments in the total volume of retail transactions in the country rose to 30.3% in 2021 from 20.1% a year earlier. The value of payments done online represented 44.1% of total retail transactions, higher than the 26.8% share in 2020.

SMALL CUTS

Meanwhile, Mr. Medalla said the central bank could deliver small increments of reductions in the RRR until it reaches the single-digit level.

"(But) the cut in the reserve requirements will happen (if) everybody believes that inflation is clearly moving towards our target. Our problem is if we cut the reserve requirement, but we're still raising interest rates, the market might get confused," he said in mixed English and Filipino.

The RRR for big banks is 12%, one of the highest in the region. Reserve requirements for thrift and rural lenders are at 3% and 2%, respectively.

In March 2020, the central bank cut the RRR, or the percentage of deposits and deposit substitutes banks must keep with the BSP, by 200 bps to 12% to cushion the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Mr. Medalla said the BSP is confident headline inflation would return to the 2-4% target by the fourth quarter or early 2024.

Inflation quickened to the fastest in 14 years to 8.7% in January from 8.1% in December, marking the 10th consecutive month inflation was above the BSP's 2-4% target.

The BSP projects inflation to average 6.1% this year, higher than 5.8% last year, before easing to 3.1% in 2024.

Earlier this month, the Monetary Board hiked the policy rate by 50 basis points to 6%, the highest in nearly 16 years. It has raised the benchmark interest rate by a total of 400 bps since May 2022.

Mr. Medalla also told reporters the Philippines might reach its growth target of 6-7% this year due to strong pent-up demand. The economy grew by 7.6% in 2022. — **Keisha B. Ta-asan**

Debt-to-GDP,
from S1/1

At the end of 2022, the National Government's outstanding debt stood at P13.42 trillion, higher by 14.4% from P11.73 trillion at the end of 2021.

The think tank identified several shocks that may increase Philippine debt, such as slower GDP growth and a weaker peso.

"The results show that the government is most vulnerable to a real GDP growth shock. If COVID-19 cases surge, there might be cause for the government to continue implementing social assistance/interventions for those affected while still spending to stimulate the economy," it said.

Economic managers are targeting 6-7% GDP growth this year, slower than the 7.6% expansion in 2022.

Another risk, PIDS said, is a sudden increase in spending due to natural disasters and "realized contingent liabilities from social security institutions, public-private partnerships, or underfunded pension plans of uniformed personnel."

Despite the elevated debt, the think tank said the government should continue spending to jumpstart the economy.

"Fiscal stimulus is especially needed on items with large multiplier effects (i.e., infrastructure) and to address the risks of scarring (i.e., human capital investments)," PIDS said.

To bring down debt, PIDS said there should be "no policy reversals that compromise the revenue-raising capacity, unnecessarily increase the spending burden on the National Government or negatively impact existing measures that led to the improvement of debt before the pandemic."

"There needs to be a consideration that debt recently increased because of the pandemic crisis and not because of any fundamental issues or problems with policies and institutions," it added. — **Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson**

'Gray list,'
from S1/1

In October, Pakistan was removed from the dirty money watchdog's enhanced monitoring list after meeting 34 action items in two concurrent action plans over four years.

The Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC), on the other hand, said implementing the International Co-operation Review Group's (ICRG) action plan to address the country's strategic deficiencies is a whole-of-government concern.

"All anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing players, such as supervisors, regulators, law enforcement, prosecutors, other government agencies, and covered persons, are required to demonstrate progress in resolving all action plan items, wherever applicable," the AMLC said in an e-mail.

The National Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Strategy has also been updated to incorporate the ICRG action plan. The strategy will be implemented through subcommittees, composed of various government and law enforcement agencies."

"With the cooperation and commitment of all agencies concerned, the AMLC is optimistic that the country can promptly resolve its remaining strategic deficiencies to finally exit the gray list," it added.

Based on the FATF's latest assessment, the Philippines needs to show it is implementing effective risk-based supervision of designated nonfinancial businesses and professions. These include jewelry dealers, real estate brokers and developers and service providers for financial businesses.

The dirty money watchdog also said the country must improve monitoring controls to mitigate financial crimes associated with casino junkets.

The FATF said it would continue to track the country's progress in ensuring beneficial ownership information is streamlined and up to date for better access of law enforcement agencies. — **Keisha B. Ta-asan**

PEZA,
from S1/1

"Once proclaimed, these projects will bring in P21.207-billion investments," Mr. Panga said.

Among the ecozones awaiting the president's proclamation are Ayala Malls Capitol Central, Alta I-Hub, Robinsons Cyberpark Bacolod, SM City Santa Rosa IT Center, ArcoVia City, Parqal and 8912 Asean Avenue.

In 2022, the PEZA Board approved 29 applications for new and expansion projects for ecozones, which are estimated to bring in P96.215 billion of investments. Of the 29 projects, eight are to be located in the Calabarzon region.

Meanwhile, Mr. Panga said the PEZA is anticipating more investments in the country's ecozones following Mr. Marcos' foreign trips.

"We also expect more projects this year as a result of our investment missions in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Switzerland, Mongolia, the USA and the other upcoming trips," he said.

Mr. Panga also called for a review of Republic Act (RA) No. 11534 or the Corporate Recovery and Tax Incentives for Enterprises (CREATE) Act and the amendment of RA 7916 — the Special Economic Zone Act or PEZA law.

"PEZA is lobbying for the revisit of the CREATE Act and the amendment of the 28-year-old PEZA law to better adapt to the changes in the market and the current movement of the country's investment and business climate," he said.

PEZA oversees 421 ecozones hosting 4,346 locators. The ecozones have generated of 1.8 million direct jobs. — **R.M.D.Ochave**

Pag-IBIG members save record-high P39.84 B under MP2, up 54% in 2022

Pag-IBIG Fund members continue to show preference in the MP2 Savings program in 2022 as total savings reached nearly P40 billion, setting yet a new record-high for the amount saved voluntarily by members under the program in a year, its top officials said Monday (27 February).

For 2022, members' savings under the Modified Pag-IBIG 2 (MP2) Savings Program reached P39.84 billion, achieving an impressive 54% increase from the P25.95 billion collected in 2021.

"Pag-IBIG Fund has again set another record, this time in the amount saved by members under the MP2 Savings Program. This shows the unwavering trust of our members in our capability to excellently and prudently manage their hard-earned peso. With our strong collections, we can continue to finance the loans of our members and keep our interest rates low. These are in line with our efforts of supporting the call of President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. to provide a better life for all Filipinos," said Secretary Jose Rizalino L. Acuzar, who heads the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) and the 11-member Pag-IBIG Fund Board of Trustees.

The MP2 Savings Program is a special voluntary savings facility of Pag-IBIG Fund that comes with a maturity period of five years. With a low entry point of P500 as minimum savings, it is designed for active Pag-IBIG Fund members who wish to save more and earn higher dividends, in addition to the mandatory Pag-IBIG Regular Savings they save every month. It provides members the option to claim the earnings of their MP2 Savings annually or compounded at the time of its maturity. The program is also open to pensioners and retirees who were once Pag-IBIG members and had at least two years worth of savings prior to retirement. Initially made available to members in 2010, the MP2 Savings has seen phenomenal growth over the past few years, as more members find it as a safe and low-risk savings facility which provides competitive returns.

Pag-IBIG Fund Chief Executive Officer Marilene C. Acosta, meanwhile, noted the increase in the total number of MP2 savers in 2022. From 750,267 in 2021, MP2 savers increased to 977,643 or 30.3% by the end of 2022. Acosta further emphasized that the MP2 has become an instrument that has allowed more workers to save, with 86% of the agency's total MP2 Savers having an average savings of P19,357.

"We are very happy that the MP2 Savings continues to encourage more and more Filipino workers to save. Through the program, we have made more Filipino workers appreciate the value of saving by providing them with a secure savings channel for their future goals. Our members can rest assured that we shall do our best to grow their savings and provide them the highest possible returns. That is Lingkod Pag-IBIG at work," Acosta said.