

## Business

# Twitter cuts more staff as Musk turmoil grows

## Racism row pushing advertisers further away from online platform

**SAN FRANCISCO:** Reports of more layoffs at Twitter landed on Monday as owner Elon Musk waded into a racism controversy that risked pushing advertisers further away from the struggling platform.

Musk called US media "racist" on Sunday after multiple American newspapers announced they would stop publishing a popular comic strip whose creator called Black people a hate group. Musk, chief of electric car company Tesla and Twitter, made his comment in regard to backlash to a rant by Scott Adams, creator of the long-running "Dilbert" comic strip—a satirical take on office life.

Adams, like Musk, has increasingly stoked controversy with his views on social issues. "For a 'very' long time, US media was racist against non-white people, now they're racist against whites & Asians," Musk wrote in a post on Twitter, where he has reinstated thousands of users banned for hate speech.

"Same thing happened with elite colleges & high schools in America. Maybe they can try not being racist." Under Musk's leadership, Tesla has been hit with multiple lawsuits alleging racism and researchers say hate speech has flourished at Twitter since his takeover.

"It's as though Elon Musk is on a whirlwind tour to try to put Twitter out of business," said independent tech analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group. "All he has to do is keep quiet, but he has to constantly spout stuff that alienates advertisers."

### No 'mistake'

The controversy came as the New York Times reported that Twitter had laid off at least 200

employees, or 10 percent of its already decimated workforce. The fresh round of layoffs included product managers, big data experts and engineers working on machine learning and platform reliability.

Twitter did not immediately confirm the reports when contacted by AFP. Esther Crawford, in charge of the social network's product development, confirmed on Twitter that she was one of the employees let go. Crawford was among the few remaining Twitter executives from before its October acquisition by Musk who had not resigned or been fired. Head of the new Twitter Blue verification program, she had been a staunch supporter of Musk and the company, going so far as to retweet a photo of herself sleeping in a sleeping bag at her workplace. "The worst take you could have from watching me go all-in on Twitter 2.0 is that my optimism or hard work was a mistake," she wrote on Twitter.

Another senior employee, Martijn de Kuyper, tweeted on Saturday that it "looks like I'm let go" after he could no longer access his emails from a French Alps ski holiday. Since Musk took ownership of Twitter, the platform has been riven by chaos, with mass layoffs, the return of thousands of banned accounts and major advertisers fleeing. The app has also seen a string of technical snafus, including an incident where tweets by Musk suddenly dominated the feeds of millions of users, even those not following the tycoon.

Meanwhile, Musk has encouraged users to communicate more freely on Twitter and said the site would impose the least amount of censorship allowed by law. "Right now, you would have to be an idiot to advertise on Twitter," analyst Enderle said



**SAN FRANCISCO:** In this file photo taken on January 24, 2023, Tesla CEO Elon Musk leaves the Phillip Burton Federal Building in San Francisco, California. Reports of more layoffs at Twitter landed on February 27, 2023, as owner Elon Musk waded into a racism controversy that risked pushing advertisers further away from the struggling platform. —AFP

of the potential for marketing messages to appear near vile or harmful tweets. "There is just too much downside risk of damaging your brand and alienating your customers."

With Twitter now a private company, internal data is not readily available, but analysis by firm Pathmatics by Sensor Tower found that more than half of Twitter's top 1,000 advertisers in September were no longer spending on the plat-

form in January. Musk has tried to wean Twitter from advertising and promote subscriptions as a new way to bring in cash—an idea that Facebook-owner Meta is testing as well—but so far the results have been disappointing.

According to industry website The Information, around 180,000 people in the US were paying for Twitter as of mid-January, which counted for less than 0.2 percent of monthly active users. —AFP



**BEAUMONTOIS-EN-PERIGORD, France:** A French farmer stands beside a tractor powered by biomethane near the farm of the Guerin family, which produces biomethane, also known as renewable natural gas, in Beaumontois-en-Perigord, southwestern France. — AFP photos

## Cow manure fuels French tractors

**PARIS:** A French farmer steps away from his barn and fills up a tractor with fuel made from the manure of his cows, an attempt to put their climate-damaging methane to good use. Anchored by a stone farmhouse, much has changed on the Guerin family farm in the southern Dordogne region since its founding in 1926. The cow barn is largely automated, and features two huge, partially buried tanks covered with rounded domes that capture the methane emitted from the cow dung.

A dark green filling station with a pump and bank card payment terminal is connected to the facilities—but it isn't diesel that comes out of the nozzle. Instead it is bioNGV—renewable natural gas for vehicles—produced on the farm, a substance that is essentially methane. Cleaner than diesel, it is also cheaper and now powers all the farm's cars and a new tractor—the first to run on bioNGV that its manufacturer, the Italian-American firm New Holland, began selling last year.

The farm's owner, Bertrand Guerin, hopes the truck he uses to collect milk will also soon be filling up at his site. The 59-year-old is also seeking to attract the visitors to the region from Britain and the Netherlands, where cars that run on natural gas are more common. The filling station is part of a new chain, Biogaz de France, created by an association of farmers producing methane in which Guerin serves as vice president.

### Mix and ferment

His concern is that market giants such as Engie



**BEAUMONTOIS-EN-PERIGORD:** French farmer Bertrand Guerin (center) uses a biomethane refueling station on the farm of the Guerin family.

and TotalEnergies, which are themselves looking to diversify away from fossil fuels, decide to move into and dominate the market for methane derived from agriculture. "Let the farmers develop this sector," Guerin said. In the vast barn a Montbeliarde cow ambles over to the milking machine.

After giving up several liters of milk—all without any human intervention—she enjoys a spot of massage from a rotating brush. She calmly steps over the automatic scraper that removes the manure of the farm's hundred cows from the barn without giving it a thought. The manure, urine and any hay on the floor is pumped into the domes before any methane is released.

Methane has a much greater climate-warming power than carbon dioxide, and accounts for a huge share of the climate impact from livestock farming. Methane, whether it comes from cow burps or their manure, accounts for almost half of French agriculture's emissions. "On all livestock farms we have methane which escapes," Guerin said. — AFP

as quickly as hoped have spooked traders this month as they bet on more US interest rate hikes, wiping out most of January's equities rally.

"It hasn't been the most thrilling start to the week but that didn't stop investors from piling back into stocks on Monday in the hope that January data proves to be an anomaly," said Oanda analyst Craig Erlam. "That enthusiasm didn't flow through" to Tuesday, he added.

Principal Asset Management analyst Seema Shah cautioned that it was "increasingly clear" that the Federal Reserve "is not yet finished with rate hikes". "Relentless monetary tightening will eventually weigh on both the economy and earnings—a headwind that will, inevitably, renew and extend the equity market drawdown," she cautioned. London stocks were weighed down Tuesday also by poor results from online supermarket Ocado.

Ocado shares slumped 7.6 percent to 577.20 pence in midday trade, topping London's fallers after revealing it doubled losses last year as customers cut spending in response to rising prices. Elsewhere, Frankfurt and Paris edged higher in early afternoon deals. — AFP

## Saudi develops a global integrated logistics park

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia aims to develop a global integrated logistics park in the Al-Khumrah region, west of the Kingdom. The Saudi Ports Authority (Mawani) and Jeddah Chamber of Commerce signed an agreement to set up a \$267.6 million integrated logistics park at Al-Khumrah, south of Jeddah, to boost economic development, national investments, and partnership with the private sector.

Two weeks ago, Mawani and Maersk began construction on Saudi Arabia's largest Integrated Logistics Park at Jeddah Islamic Port, with investments amounting to \$346.6 million, providing more than 2,500 direct and indirect job opportunities.

The new region directly achieves Mawani's strategic objectives as the main link in the system, in line with the goals of the National Transport and Logistics Strategy, by establishing the Kingdom's position as a global logistics hub. The park is also linked to the National Industrial Development and Logistics Program (NIDLP), and Al-Khumra is one of the pioneering areas targeted for development as a global logistics region. It aims to increase the optimal utilization of Mawani's assets and achieve diversification by providing more than 10,000 new direct and indirect jobs in the logistics sector through business and investments.

The 3-km logistics park comprises three zones: shared warehouses, medium-sized storage yards and single warehouses, and large storage yards and on-demand warehouses. The various zones will meet the requirements of importers and exporters of stocking multipurpose cargo, chilled and frozen goods, food commodities, and fragile

goods. The park offers move-in-ready warehouses, storage yards, re-export zones, custom storage, logistics amenities, commercial units, residential units, staff accommodation, state-of-the-art infrastructure like roads and green spaces, and other essential services.

Meanwhile, Cruise Saudi, wholly owned by the Public Investment Fund (PIF), welcomed nearly 9,000 tourists from five European countries to celebrate Saudi Founding Day.

The 8,800 tourists visited key Saudi destinations through three cruise ship calls in Jeddah Islamic Port and King Abdulaziz Port in Dammam. Tourists were welcomed at the passengers' terminal with Founding Day traditional activities, including cultural gifts, Saudi coffee, dates, and folklore dances, in collaboration with all relevant authorities and local partners.

The tourists, representing different nationalities, namely English, Spanish, Italian, French, and Russian, witnessed and engaged in the vibrant Saudi Founding Day festivities in their various expeditions in both Jeddah and the Eastern Province through Dammam Port.

The activities included a flight to visit Al-Ula, Saudi's first UNESCO World Heritage site, an enjoyable walk at Jeddah's Waterfront, and a journey back in time through centuries of culture and traditions by visiting the UNESCO World Heritage site of Jeddah Historical District, filled with vibrant artwork, exotic scents, traditional markets, and authentic Hijazi architecture unique to the region.

They could also tour Al-Ahsa Oasis, Saudi's third UNESCO World Heritage site accessible via cruising, exploring the Qara Mountain, Princes' School, and Al-Qaisariyah Souq. The ongoing cruising season of Cruise Saudi, from November 2022 until May 2023, is set to welcome over 75 scheduled calls by ships from several global cruise lines sailing the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf. — Agencies



**OSLO:** Sweden's Greta Thunberg (rear, third right) and other young climate activists from the "Nature and Youth" and "Norwegian Samirs Riksforbund Nuorat" groups block the entrance of Norway's Energy ministry as they protest against wind turbines built on land traditionally used to herd reindeer, in Oslo, on February 27, 2023. — AFP

## Thunberg, activists expand Norway wind farm protest

**OSLO:** Climate activist Greta Thunberg and dozens of indigenous Sami activists expanded a protest Tuesday against contested wind turbines in Norway by blocking entrances to several government ministries. They were challenging the turbines in the Fosen region of western Norway which were still in operation on reindeer herding land despite a landmark court ruling more than a year ago.

Climate activists expanded their protest blocking access to the energy ministry to include the finance

ministry. "Today, we are shutting down the state," said Ella Marie Haetta Isaksen, a Sami musician and activist. An indigenous minority of around 100,000 people spread over the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, the Sami have traditionally lived off reindeer herding and fishing.

On Tuesday morning, Norwegian police forcibly removed a dozen activists from one of the ministry's entrances. The protests came over a year after Norway's highest court unanimously ruled that the expropriation and operating permits for the construction of the 151 turbines were invalid.

However, they gave no guidance on what should be done with the turbines, which were already in operation. The Norwegian authorities have so far held off taking action and ordered further assessments, hoping to find a way that the turbines and Sami people can coexist. —AFP

## Stocks scatter as traders mull US rates outlook

**NEW YORK:** Stock markets diverged Tuesday as dealers mulled fears the Federal Reserve would push interest rates higher than expected and for longer as it battles stubbornly-high inflation. Oil prices rebounded, while the pound extended gains won on Brexit deal alterations aimed at smoothing some trading obstacles between the UK and the European Union.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen on Monday agreed a sweeping overhaul of trade rules in Northern Ireland, which borders EU member Ireland. Asia and Europe struggled to track overnight advances on Wall Street ahead of further US economic data due this week. Recent figures showing a robust US jobs market and inflation not coming down