

# Florida teen mastermind charged in epic Twitter hack

Twitter says the hackers used a phone to fool the social media company's employees into giving them access to accounts

AFP | San Francisco

Criminal charges were filed against the suspected teenage mastermind of an epic Twitter hack and two others who allegedly helped hijack celebrity accounts to swindle people out of more than \$100,000 in a cryptocurrency scheme.

Prosecutors in Florida said they filed 30 felony counts against 17-year-old resident of the state identified as the "mastermind" of the cyberattack. He was arrested in Tampa, Hillsborough State Attorney Andrew Warren said.

Separately, the US Attorney's Office in San Francisco announced charges against three people, one of them from Britain, for roles in the mid-July cyberattack that rocked Twitter.

US officials said 19-year-old Mason "Chaewon" Sheppard of Britain along with Nima Fazeli, 22, of Florida face criminal charges in the case.

Details about the third individual were not released by US officials because he is a minor, but it appeared they were referring to the Florida teenager being prosecuted as adult in that state.

The attack on Twitter involved a combination of "tech-



Twitter logo is seen on a smartphone

nical breaches and social engineering" that let hackers hijack accounts of politicians, celebrities, and musicians, according to federal prosecutors.

### Follow the money

The three defendants are accused of hacking Twitter accounts, creating a scam Bitcoin account, and sending out imposter tweets from hijacked account offering to double Bitcoin cryptocurrency deposits.

"This case serves as a great example of how following the money, international collabora-

tion, and public-private partnerships can work to successfully take down a perceived anonymous criminal enterprise," said criminal investigation special agent Kelly Jackson of the Internal Revenue Service.

The attack which Twitter said resulted from a "phone spear phishing" attack enabled hackers to take control of accounts of famous people such as Bill Gates, Elon Musk and former US president Barack Obama and dupe people into sending Bitcoin.

"These crimes were perpetrated using the names of famous people and celebrities, but they're not the primary victims here," Warren said in a release.

"This 'Bit-Con' was designed to steal money from regular Americans from all over the country."

### Scamming by phone

Hackers who accessed dozens of high-profile Twitter accounts in mid-July gained access to the system with an attack that tricked a handful of employees into giving up their credentials, according to a company update.

Twitter said this week that the July 15 incident by Bitcoin scammers stemmed from a "spear phishing" attack which deceived employees about the origin of the messages.

The hackers "targeted a small number of employees through a phone spear phishing attack," according to a Twitter Support statement.

"This attack relied on a significant and concerted attempt to mislead certain employees and exploit human vulnerabilities to gain access to our internal systems."

Twitter said that following the incident it has "significantly limited access to our internal tools and systems" and is taking additional steps to tighten security. The massive hack of high-profile users from Elon Musk to Joe Biden affected at least 130 accounts, with tweets posted by the usurpers duping people into sending Bitcoin to accounts that Warren said were associated with Clark.

The official accounts of Apple, Uber, Kanye West, Bill Gates, Barack Obama and others were also affected. Faked tweets were sent from 45 accounts, according to Twitter, and the hackers accessed private messages of 36 and downloaded Twitter data from seven.



The hackers targeted 130 accounts - they managed to tweet from 45 accounts, access the direct message inboxes of 36, and download the Twitter data from seven

### News in brief

#### 5 killed in Nepal landslides

Five people including three children were killed in two landslides in Nepal, raising to 175 the toll of dead since the monsoon



season began in May, a home ministry official said. A 30-year-old woman and her three children, aged between 10 months and nine years, were killed when a landslide triggered by heavy rains swept their house away in Gulmi district in the west of the Himalayan nation on Friday, Murari Wasti said. One person was killed in another landslide in Sunsari district in east Nepal.



Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi on Friday called an early general election for June 6, 2021, roughly a year ahead of when it would normally be held.

#### Iraq PM calls early election

Early elections are a key demand of Iraqi anti-government protesters who staged months of mass demonstrations last year and were killed in their hundreds by security forces and gunmen suspected of links to militia groups. Iraqi's parliament must still ratify the election date.

US federal officers will stay in the protest-racked city of Portland until local law enforcement officials finish a "cleanup of anarchists and agitators," President Donald Trump said.



The forces -- whose deployment was seen by many as part of the president's law-and-order strategy for re-election and exacerbated tensions between authorities and anti-racism protesters -- had been scheduled to begin their phased pullout from Portland.



Eight military personnel remained missing at sea Friday nearly a full day after a US Marine amphibious assault vehicle sank in deep water off the California coast during training exercises.

#### 8 still missing after US Marine amphibious vehicle sinks

Officials at Camp Pendleton in southern California said that one of eight Marines rescued in the mishap off the shore of San Clemente Island was declared dead after being taken to hospital and two more remained in intensive care. The fate of seven other Marines and one sailor was unknown nearly 24 hours after the accident as rescue operations involving multiple aircraft and boats continued, said Lieutenant General Joseph Osterman.

A federal appeals court overturned Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's death sentence for helping carry out the 2013 attack, which killed three people and wounded more than 260 others. Tsarnaev and his older brother set off a pair of homemade pressure-cooker bombs near the finish line of the world-renowned race, tearing through the packed crowd and causing many people to lose legs.

Hundreds of anti-racism protesters took over one of Lisbon's main squares on Friday to demand justice for Bruno Cande, a Black actor shot dead in a busy street last weekend.



Cande, 39 and of Guinean origin, was shot several times by a white man in his eighties at Avenida de Moscavide, around 10 km from Lisbon's city centre, according to police. A suspect was detained and is awaiting trial. Portugal's criminal investigation police agency, the PJ, has not confirmed what motivated the attack.

## Expect 'lengthy' coronavirus pandemic WHO warns

AFP | Geneva

The World Health Organization yesterday warned the coronavirus pandemic was likely to be "lengthy" after its emergency committee met to evaluate the crisis six months after sounding the international alarm.

The committee "highlighted the anticipated lengthy duration of this COVID-19 pandemic", the WHO said in a statement, and warned of the risk of "response fatigue" given the socio-economic pressures on countries.

The panel gathered for the fourth time over the coronavirus crisis, half a year on from its January 30 declaration of a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) -- the WHO's highest level of alarm.

"WHO continues to assess the global risk level of COVID-19 to be very high," it said.

## Recovered from virus, Brazil's Bolsonaro says nothing to fear

AFP | Rio de Janeiro

Fresh off a bout of COVID-19, President Jair Bolsonaro said nearly everyone will probably end up catching the new coronavirus, urging Brazilians to "face up to it" and saying there was nothing to fear.

The far-right leader's latest bid to downplay the pandemic came as Brazil closed in on the grim milestone of 100,000 people killed by the virus, the second-highest death toll in the world, after the United States.

Bolsonaro, who is just coming off three weeks in quarantine with a case of the virus, pointed to his own case as an example.

"I'm in the high-risk group," the 65-year-old president told journalists during a visit to the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul.

"I knew I was going to catch it someday, as I think unfortunately nearly everyone here is going to catch it eventually. What are you afraid of? Face up to it," he said.

"I regret the deaths. But people die every day, from lots of things. That's life."

Bolsonaro has faced criticism for his handling of the pandemic as it has surged in Brazil, the country with the second-highest number of cases and deaths in the world: more than 2.6 million and 92,000, respectively.



Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro takes a ride his motorcycle

Bolsonaro, who has compared the virus to a "little flu," has fought stay-at-home measures to contain it and regularly flouted social distancing guidelines, hitting the streets of Brasilia to exchange handshakes and hugs with supporters.

He tested positive for the virus on July 7 after coming down with a fever, and spent three weeks in isolation at the presidential palace.

On Thursday, in his first public event since his illness, he greeted a crowd of supporters in the northeastern state of Piaui, removing his face mask to loud cheers.

The same day, the president's office announced his wife had tested positive for the virus.

