

News in brief

◆ The former Communist

Party head of Tibet was handed a suspended death sentence on Wednesday for taking bribes worth almost \$50 million, a court in China said. Wu Yingjie, who served as party secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region from 2016 to 2021, illegally accepted bribes totalling more than 343 million yuan (\$47.8 million), an intermediate court in Beijing said in a statement on WeChat. The court said his crimes were “particularly serious, the social impact particularly vile” and caused “particularly heavy losses” for the country and people. President Xi Jinping has overseen a wide-ranging campaign against official corruption since coming to power more than a decade ago, with critics saying it also serves as a way to purge political rivals. The court said Wu used his official positions in the region stretching back to 2006 to give companies and individuals help on contracts and business operations.



China hands Tibet official suspended death sentence over \$50 mn in bribes

◆ Portugal's parliament
lawmakers
vote for tighter
migration rules

Portugal's parliament voted yesterday in favour of strengthening migration policies, with the centre-right governing coalition relying on the support of far-right deputies to overcome opposition from the left. Lawmakers supporting the minority government of Prime Minister Luis Montenegro voted alongside members of the far-right party Chega, which became the country's second-largest political force in May's elections but is not part of the ruling coalition. Under the new provisions, work visas will now only be granted to highly qualified immigrants, and the conditions for family reunification will become more stringent. Brazilians, who constitute the largest immigrant contingent, will no longer benefit from a rule that allowed them to gain residency status after arriving in Portugal.

◆ Allegations that Finnish president

Alexander Stubb's son got preferential treatment to land an internship at a parliament-linked research institute have sparked a string of complaints to government bodies, officials said yesterday. Finland's Parliamentary Ombudsman told AFP they had received 10 complaints over the decision to give 21-year-old Oliver Stubb a three-month internship at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA). The Chancellor of Justice said it had received two. Finnish media revealed in June that he had won the appointment over more experienced candidates. Public broadcaster Yle reported Wednesday that of the last 11 interns appointed to FIIA since 2020, he was one of only two who were undergraduates. Newspaper Ilta-Sanomat has earlier reported that the other candidates in the top five for this year's internship all had more work experience than Stubb.

Finnish institute under fire after president's son wins internship



SPOTLIGHT

No magic fix: 'Harry Potter' stars banned from driving

AFP | London, United Kingdom

Two stars of the “Harry Potter” films, including actress Emma Watson, were each banned from driving for six months Wednesday after being caught speeding in separate incidents.

Watson, 35, who played Hermione Granger, the friend of boy wizard Potter in the hugely popular movie franchise, was banned for driving at 38 miles (61 km) an hour in a 30-mile zone in southeastern Banbury last July.

Zoe Wanamaker, 76, who played Quidditch teacher Madame Hooch in “Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone”, was banned for six months for her offence.

She had been caught driving at 46 miles an hour in a 40-mile zone of the M4 motor-

way in southeastern Berkshire last August.

The cases were dealt with separately by a lower magistrates court in the town of High Wycombe.

Neither of the stars attended the hearings, at which they were each fined £1,044 (\$1,400).

Watson, who was stopped while driving her blue Audi, has been studying at Oxford University. Her lawyer told the court that although she was a student “she is in a position to pay the fine”.



● Israel has presented itself as a defender of the Druze

● Sectarian clashes have killed nearly 250 people

● Syrian government forces entered the majority-Druze city of Sweid

● Israel's Katz called on Damascus to “leave the Druze in Sweida alone”

AFP | Damascus, Syria

Israel bombed the Syrian army headquarters in Damascus yesterday after warning the Islamist-led government to leave the Druze minority alone in its Sweida heartland, where a war monitor says sectarian clashes have killed nearly 300 people.

Syrian government forces on Tuesday entered the majority-Druze city of Sweida, in the country's south, with the stated aim of overseeing a ceasefire agreed with Druze community leaders after clashes with local

Bedouin tribes left dozens dead.

However, witnesses reported that the government forces joined with the Bedouin in attacking Druze fighters and civilians in a bloody rampage through the city.

The fighting marks the most serious outbreak of violence in Syria since government forces battled Druze fighters in Sweida province and near Damascus in April and May leaving more than 100 people dead.

The Islamist-led authorities have had strained relations with Syria's patchwork of religious and ethnic minorities since they toppled longtime leader Bashar al-Assad in December.

Israel has presented itself as a defender of the Druze, although some analysts say that is a pretext for pursuing its own military goal of keeping Syrian government forces as far from the border as possible.

Syrian state TV reported several Israeli strikes on Wednesday near the army and defence ministry headquarters in central Damascus, and Israel's military said it had “struck the entrance of the Syrian regime's military headquarters”.

The Syrian health ministry said in a preliminary toll that nine people were wounded in the strikes.

‘Existential battle’

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz called on Damascus to “leave the Druze in Sweida alone”, later threatening in a statement to unleash “painful blows” to “eliminate the forces that attacked the Druze until their full withdrawal” from Syria's south.

Israel, home to tens of thousands of Druze, said it was sending more troops to the ar-

stice line between the occupied Golan Heights and Syrian-controlled territory.

Dozens of people were trying to cross the heavily fortified frontier, according to AFP correspondent in Majdal Shams, a mainly Druze town in the Israeli-annexed Golan.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged Druze not to cross, warning of a “very serious” situation in Sweida.

A military statement said Israeli forces were “operating to prevent the infiltration” from Syrian territory and to “safely return the civilians who crossed the border” from the Israeli-controlled side.

Netanyahu said in February that southern Syria must be completely demilitarised, warning that Israel would not accept the presence of forces of the Islamist-led government near territory it controls.

The head of the Druze

Syrian security forces
deploy amid clashes
in the
southern
Sweida
city



community in Israel, Sheikh Mowafaq Tarif, called the situation “an existential battle for the Druze community”.

The Syrian presidency condemned in a statement the “heinous acts” in Sweida, expressing “full commitment to investigating all related incidents and punishing all those proven to be involved”.

Sporadic gunfire continued to ring out in Sweida on Wednesday, an AFP correspondent reported.

Columns of smoke were seen rising from several areas amid the sound of shelling.

The correspondent counted the bodies of around 30 combatants, some in plain clothes and some in military uniform.

20 people killed in aid point crush in southern Gaza

At least 20 people were killed in a chaotic crush at an aid centre in southern Gaza yesterday, with the site's operator blaming “agitators” within the crowd and the territory's civil defence agency attributing the panic to Israeli gunfire.

It was the US- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation's (GHF) first acknowledgment of deaths at one of its aid centres after weeks of chaotic scenes and near-daily reports of Palestinians being killed nearby while waiting to collect rations.