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Placido Domingo honoured in Spain after harassment allegations

Madrid.—Spanish opera star Placido Domingo was honoured with an award at Madrid's Teatro Real yesterday, a day after receiving a standing ovation for his first performance in his home country since a union said he had routinely harassed women.

Spain last year cancelled planned performances by Domingo at publicly funded theatres, while the singer pulled out of shows after an investigation by the American Guild of Musical Artists concluded he had behaved inappropriately with female performers.



More than three dozen singers, dancers, musicians, voice teachers and backstage staff said they witnessed or experienced inappropriate behaviour over the last three decades. U.S. institutions including the Metropolitan Opera in New York and the San Francisco Opera cancelled planned engagements with Domingo and he resigned as general director of the Los Angeles Opera. Domingo has apologised for having made colleagues feel uncomfortable but denies having behaved aggressively or acting to obstruct any fellow performer's career.



WHO issues COVID-19 warning to Europe before summer travels

London.—The World Health Organization yesterday urged Europeans to travel responsibly during the summer holiday season and warned the continent was “by no means out of danger” in the battle against COVID-19 despite a steady decline of infec-

tion rates in recent weeks. “With increasing social gatherings, greater population mobility, and large festivals and sports tournaments taking place in the coming days and weeks, WHO Europe calls for caution,” the WHO's European head Hans Kluge told

a press briefing. “If you choose to travel, do it responsibly. Be conscious of the risks. Apply common sense and don't jeopardize hard-earned gains,” Kluge said.

Over the last two months, new COVID-19 cases, deaths and hospitali-

sations have declined, prompting 36 out of 53 countries in the region to start easing restrictions.

The number of reported COVID-19 infections last week came in at 368,000, a fifth of weekly cases reported during a peak in April this year, Kluge said.

“We should all recognize the progress made across most countries in the region, we must also acknowledge that we are by no means out of danger,” he added.

Kluge said the so-called Delta variant, which was first identified in India,

was a matter of concern. This variant, he said, “shows increased transmissibility and some immune escape is poised to take hold in the region while many among vulnerable populations, above the age of 60, remain unprotected.”

Health minister Hancock defends COVID-19 record

London.—British health minister Matt Hancock rejected allegations by a former top aide of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, saying there was never a national shortage of protective equipment and the government followed clinical guidance on care homes.

Johnson's former aide Dominic Cummings last month said Hancock had repeat-

edly lied in government meetings on COVID-19, and called for him to be sacked.

Hancock denied the allegations made by Cummings and noted he had not provided evidence for his claims.

“What I did and what my team did was what we believed to be the best thing we could on the information that we had to protect lives,” Hancock told a parliamen-

tary select committee hearing yesterday, adding he had never told Johnson anything he knew to be untrue.

“Despite my deep regret at the deaths that have occurred, I know that I did that with the right motive of being straight with people throughout.”

Over 127,000 people have died in Britain within 28 days of a positive COVID-19 test,

and Cummings said the government's inept handling of the pandemic led to tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths.

Cummings in particular criticised Hancock's approach to care homes and personal protective equipment (PPE), saying Hancock had said people would be tested before being discharged into care homes, which then didn't happen.

