Egyptian doctor on the run after mass death sentences

VATICAN FIRES ‘BISHOP OF BLING’
Scandal ‘deep embarrassment’ for German Church

WASHINGTON: The Secret Service sent three agents home from the Netherlands just before President Barack Obama’s arrival after one agent was found inebriated in an Amsterdam hotel, the Secret Service said Tuesday.

The three agents were benched Sunday for “disciplinary action,” said Secret Service spokesman Ed Donovan, declining to elaborate. Donovan said the incident was prior to Obama’s arrival Monday in the country and did not compromise the president’s security in any way. Still, the incident represents a freshblemish for an elite agency struggling to rehabilitate its reputation following a high-profile prostitution scandal and other allegations of misconduct.

An inspector general’s report in December concluded there was no evidence of wide-spread misconduct, in line with the service’s long-standing assertion that it has no tolerance for inappropriate behavior. The agents sent home from Amsterdam were placed on administrative leave, according to The Washington Post, which first reported the disciplinary action. The newspaper said all three were on the Counter-Assault Team, which protects the president if he comes under attack, and that one agent was a “team leader.”

One agent was discovered highly intoxicated by staff at a hotel, who reported it to the US Embassy, said a person familiar with the situation, who wasn’t authorized to discuss the alleged behavior on the record and demanded anonymity. The other two agents were deemed compliant because they didn’t intervene despite being in a position to assist the drunken agent or tamp down his behavior, the person said. “It wasn’t like a big crazy party,” the person said. Obama arrived in the Netherlands early Monday on the first leg of a weeklong, four-country trip. He departed for Brussels on Tuesday night, and there were no known security issues during his stay in the Netherlands.

Before Obama traveled anywhere abroad, a view of Secret Service and other government officials are dispatched in advance to prepare the intense security operations needed to protect the president in unfamiliar territory.

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Seeking to turn a page on that chapter in the service’s history, Obama last year named veteran Secret Service agent Julia Pierson as the agency’s first female director and signaled his desire to change the culture at the male-dominated service. Less than a year later, two agents were drinking heavily or what time any of them would have been expected to show up for a shift.

The Secret Service’s reputation for credible, fraternity-like behavior nosedived in April 2012 in the run-up to another Obama foreign trip, this one in the Caribbean resort city of Cartagena, Colombia, where 13 agents and officers were accused of carousing with female foreign nationals at a hotel where they were staying before Obama’s arrival. After a night of heavy partying in bars and clubs, the employees brought women, including prostitutes, back to their hotel. Six of the officers eventually resigned or retired, while others had their security clearances revoked or were removed from duty.

A 145-page report issued late last month by the inspector general determined there was no evidence of widespread misconduct within the Secret Service. Following the South America prostitution scandal, the agency put new procedures in place, including a ban on bringing foreign nationals to hotel rooms where agents and officers are staying. —AP

VATICAN CITY: The Vatican removed a German bishop yesterday because he spent 31 million euros ($43 million) of Church funds on an elite agent residence where Pope Francis was planning a private getaway.

Last year, Francis showed his irritation over the whole affair by leaving the bishop waiting for eight days in Rome before removing him from his high-profile job somewhere. The bishop, dubbed the “bishop of bling,” had been ordered to stay out of his diocese temporarily last October while a local Church investigation and audit into cost over-ages were made. He offered his resignation at the time. A spokesman for the Vatican’s department that oversees Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst noted an internal department that oversees Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst had not accepted his resignation after July 9, when he was temporarily put on administrative leave.

The Holy Father also made it plain yesterday that the diocese of Limburg is expected to release detailed of the investigation yesterday. “The Holy Father asks the faithful of the diocese of Limburg to accept the decisions of the Holy See with dignity and to continue to support the work and the mission of the Church,” the Vatican said.

Another prelate, Monsignor Manfred Grothe, has been appointed to run the diocese as an apostolic administrator on the Vatican’s behalf for the time being and a position will be found for Tebartz-van Elst in due course, the Vatican said. The Limburg affair has been an embarrassment for the Vatican, as Pope Francis has been urging Church officials to discard the excess and luxury of the past decades.

Spokesmen for some bishops told the Vatican not to be too lenient. He has faced an outcry on Twitter by removing the space after the Vatican auditor general .

LIMBURG: People watch a part of the residence of Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst (inset) in Limbourg, Germany. Pope Francis yesterday permanently removed a German bishop from his Limburg diocese after his 31 million-euro ($43 million) new residence complex caused an uproar among the faithful. —AP

3 SECRET SERVICE AGENTS BENCHED

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