

Pressure on Berlusconi heats up after salacious documents leaked

PM says he has 'nothing to be ashamed of'

By Guy Dinmore in Rome

Silvio Berlusconi's battle with prosecutors over allegations of exploiting an under-age teenage prostitute intensified last night as all 389 pages of their investigation were leaked on to the internet, driving speculation that Italy's billionaire prime minister would be forced to step down.

He took to the airwaves for a second time to defend himself, in a sign of the seriousness with which he is treating the matter. Mr Berlusconi said he was the victim of persecution by a politicised judiciary and pledged that his government would continue.

Magistrates would not be allowed to "illegitimately destroy someone who has been elected by the citizens", he said.

"I have done nothing to be ashamed of," said the 74-year-old prime minister, who is also accused of abuse of office in putting pressure on police in May to get Karima el Mahroug, the 17-year-old, out of detention.

With Mr Berlusconi also facing the possibility of two trials resuming against him on charges of corruption and tax fraud, opposition leaders are stepping up calls for his resignation. Speculation is mounting that his own allies are preparing to ask him to go. A spokesman for the prime minister denied such plans last night.

Mr Berlusconi condemned investigators for wiretapping guests at his villa near Milan, including Ms Mahroug who was among more than 20 young women alleged to have attended erotic parties he hosted last year.

But with the leaking of the official investigation – possibly by sources within parliament – Italians were able to read online pages of intercepted telephone conversations of Mr Berlusconi's associates and the women involved in "bunga bunga" sex parties and alleged prostitution.

Pier Ferdinando Casini, leader of a Catholic opposition party, and Gianfranco Fini, a former ally who split with Mr Berlusconi last year, said Italy's image was being sullied and called on him to answer the magistrates' summons this week in Milan.

Mr Berlusconi said he would refuse to attend. He claimed he wanted to clear his name "before the judges" as soon as possible but questioned the authority of the prosecutors in Milan to question him.

