

World

Berlusconi investigators seize party videos

Italy

James Bone Rome

Investigators have recovered photographs and mobile-phone videos taken by guests at alleged "bunga bunga" sex parties at Silvio Berlusconi's home.

The images were said to have been discovered on computers and phones seized at a Milan apartment building where many of the young women who attended dinners at the Prime Minister's mansion have been living.

Prosecutors hope that the material will confirm the presence of Karima El Mahroug, the Moroccan belly-dancer known as "Ruby Heart-Stealer". The Prime Minister is under investigation for allegedly paying for sex with the woman when she was 17, an illegal act.

Mr Berlusconi, 74, refused a summons to appear before prosecutors by a deadline of yesterday. His lawyers said that the prosecutors had no jurisdiction, and that the case should be handled by a special court for ministers.

"I am not running away, and I am not resigning," Mr Berlusconi said in a telephone call to a meeting of his People of Freedom Party. "I am defending myself and reacting to what is truly an attempt to subvert the will of voters.

"Since the beginning of 2010, all the guests that came to my house in Arcore have been subject to continued phone-tapping. Is it normal in a democracy that the Prime Minister can be subject to this type of control, to this spying?"

Mr Berlusconi has denied any impropriety, blaming left-wing political rivals for the damaging rumours about his private conduct.

Ms El Mahroug has insisted that the Prime Minister never touched her, but listened to her problems. She denied that the €7,000 (£5,900) that he gave her was in return for sex, saying that the Prime Minister gave her a gift when she was in financial need.

However, one woman living in the Milan apartment building said at the weekend that she did have sex with Mr Berlusconi. Marysthele Garcia Polanco, 25, a dancer on one of Mr Berlusconi's TV channels, said that she was never paid by him. "Never money. He only helped me with some necessities — like the medical visits to San Raffaele [hospital] for my daughter. And he gave me a hand to work in television," she told *La Repubblica* newspaper.

Prosecutors plan today to re-interview Nadia Macri, an escort who



GIUSEPPE CACCIA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Karima El Mahroug said that Mr Berlusconi gave her €7,000 because she was in financial need, but never touched her



Online today

Daily reports and analysis worldwide

thetimes.co.uk/worldagenda



claims that she had sex with Mr Berlusconi. Ms Macri said that she saw Ms El Mahroug at a party at Mr Berlusconi's house on April 24 last year, and that they received payment for their presence. Prosecutors, who questioned her for five hours on Friday, want to check inconsistencies in her story.

In a TV appearance, Ms Macri displayed jewellery that she claimed Mr Berlusconi had given her. Her ex-husband, however, insisted that he had bought it for her about three years ago.

Emilio Fede, a TV presenter accused of supplying the Prime Minister with prostitutes, denied yesterday that he had invited young women to Mr Berlusconi's house. "The parties at Arcore unfolded in a safe and orderly way. If sometimes he decided to be surrounded by young women, it seems to me completely legitimate," he said.

"The Prime Minister spoke about politics. He loved recounting what

happened, and what could happen. He told of his travels. We also saw [the film] *Baaria*. And he sang, because he was, and still is, a great singer."

Mr Fede described the supposed "bunga bunga" room where the alleged orgies took place. "It's an underground room, a kind of discotheque where whoever wants to can go down after dinner to listen to music, dance and also watch films of the Prime Minister's foreign trips or football matches," he said.

"When they talk of payments... Berlusconi was loved. He didn't need to have paid encounters with a woman. It's absolutely unthinkable," he said.

Roberto Maroni, the Interior Minister and a member of Mr Berlusconi's Northern League coalition allies, yesterday appealed for a truce after the "binge of tits and bums". "His lifestyle is certainly different from mine," he wrote in a letter to the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper. "But it's his business."

Nationalists reject plea to halt protest march

Mumbai Hindu nationalists have rejected a plea by Manmohan Singh, India's Prime Minister, to abandon plans for a provocative march into Kashmir (Francis Elliott writes).

The youth wing of the Hindu-nationalist BJP said that it would raise India's flag in Srinagar, the capital of the territory claimed by India and Pakistan. The event is planned for Wednesday, which is India's Republic Day. Kashmir has been relatively peaceful in recent months with signs of gradual progress to engage separatist leaders — but there are fears that the arrival of tens of thousands of BJP supporters could rekindle unrest. Mr Singh urged activists not to use Republic Day to "score political points".

10 killed in attacks

Baghdad At least 10 people were killed and 34 wounded when a series of car bombs exploded in the Iraq capital during a Shia Muslim festival. Attacks on Shia pilgrims and police last week killed at least 110 people and wounded hundreds. (Reuters)

'Militants behind bomb'

Cairo Habib al-Adly, Egypt's Interior Minister, has blamed Army of Islam, the terror group linked to al-Qaeda, for the suicide bombing on New Year's Day that killed 21 people outside a Coptic Christian church in the port city of Alexandria. (AP)

Drive for unity

Brussels As many as 30,000 people marched through the Belgian capital urging rival Flemish and Walloon politicians to form a coalition cabinet, months after the collapse of the government. The movement began as a Facebook campaign. (AP)

Early vote for secession

Juba Preliminary results from Southern Sudan's referendum indicate a landslide vote for secession, despite the turnout exceeding 100 per cent in several areas and some votes being quarantined. The final results are due next month. (AP)

Veteran Republican who fought Clinton indicates he may run for the White House

United States

Giles Whittell Washington

The Republican who tried and failed to destroy Bill Clinton's presidency 17 years ago has given the clearest sign that he will launch his own bid for the White House.

Newt Gingrich, who led his party to an historic midterm victory in 1994, has told allies in Georgia that he intends to seek the Republican nomination, and plans to open a campaign headquarters in his old stronghold of Atlanta. Mr Gingrich, 67, has national recognition and the status of a one-man think-tank.

He also embodies a dilemma for Republicans as they seek to oust President Obama in 2012: with no obvious front-runners, the race is open to candidates who in a normal year would be considered rank outsiders.

In the week when Mr Obama's State of the Union address will set the policy agenda for the coming year, conservatives positioning themselves as his



President Obama will defend health reforms tomorrow

replacement include Herman Cain, a talk-show host who is also the former chairman of a pizza chain; Donald Trump, the property developer and reality TV host; and Michele Bachmann, a Minnesota congresswoman who rejects the theory of evolution and has argued for the abolition of the minimum wage as a way to "wipe out unemployment".

Mr Trump, worth an estimated \$2.5 billion (£1.6 billion), has not made a formal announcement but told CNN last week that he was seriously considering a White House bid for the first time. Mainstream Republicans led by

Mitt Romney, the former Governor of Massachusetts, fared best in a weekend poll in New Hampshire — where any candidate must produce a strong showing in next year's primary to have a chance of winning the nomination.

But Mr Romney would enter the primary season with a millstone around his neck — as governor he championed state health reforms that served as a template for many of those in the "Obamacare" Bill he now opposes.

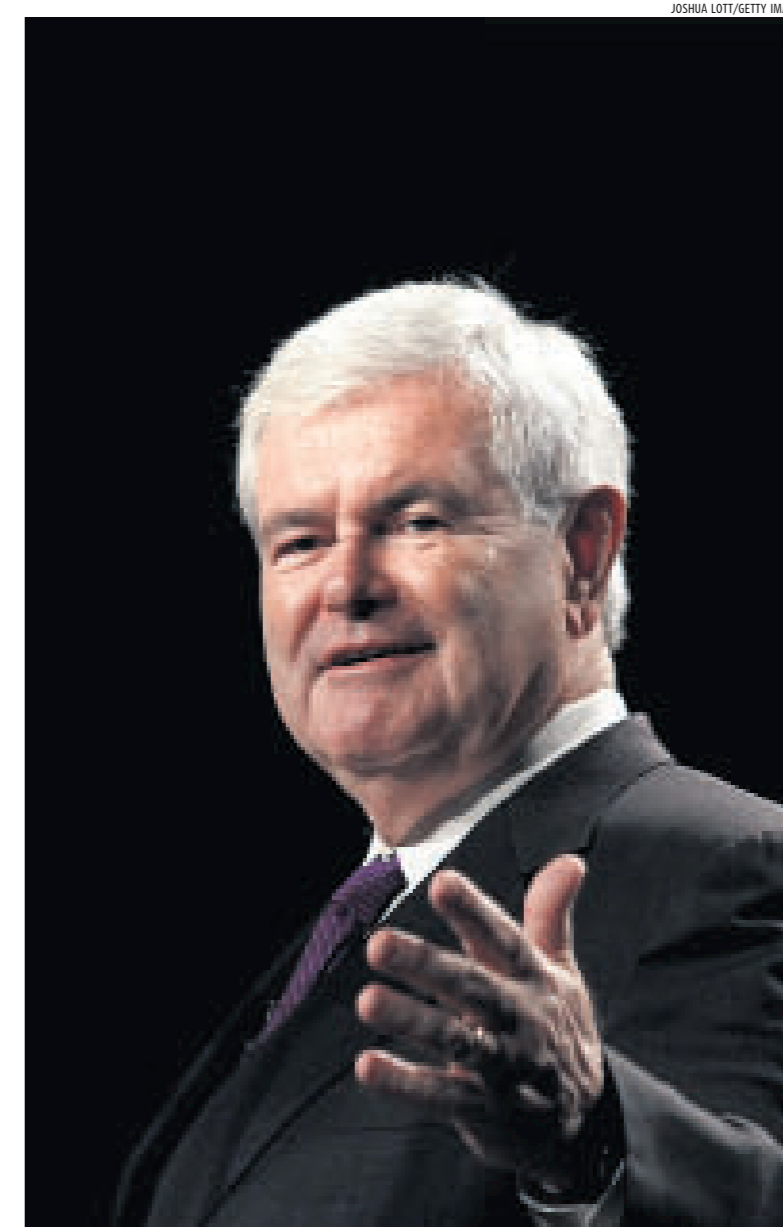
Mr Obama will defend his health reforms in tomorrow night's State of the Union address.

However, aides said that he will devote the bulk of the speech to a series of investment and budget reduction proposals designed to reposition him as a pragmatic centrist after two years in which Republicans have succeeded in branding him a die-hard liberal addicted to big government.

White House staff and the President have previewed the speech with different emphasis for different audiences, telling business leaders that he shares their fiscal conservatism, while reassuring liberal supporters, in a video released at the weekend, that he will not adopt the draconian recommendations of his own debt-reduction commission.

Last year, a rogue Republican congressman interrupted Mr Obama halfway through his speech and accused him of lying. No such outbursts are expected this time. Instead, some senators and house representatives have heeded a call after the gun rampage in Tucson for members of the two main parties to sit together rather than in rival camps.

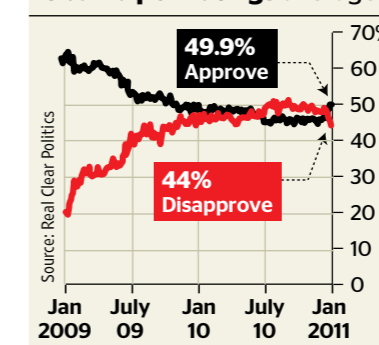
Pairings announced so far include Senators Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and John Thune of South Dakota, Senators Chuck Schumer of New York and Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, and Congressmen Anthony Weiner and Peter King — who last year engaged in a heated shouting match



JOSHUA LOTT/GETTY IMAGES

Newt Gingrich, 67, has told allies he intends to seek the Republican nomination

Obama poll ratings average



over healthcare reforms on the floor of the House of Representatives. Mr Gingrich is not guaranteed a seat for the State of the Union, since he is no longer in Congress.

He was credited with inflicting a punishing defeat on the Democrats in 1994 as House Speaker and is the author of *Contract with America*. He resigned after the Republicans lost badly in the 1998 midterms. He later admitted that while leading his party's efforts to have Mr Clinton impeached after the Monica Lewinsky affair, he was also conducting an affair.

Tim Montgomerie, page 18

Shopper hailed as a hero after revenge attack on armed robber

Mexico

Girish Gupta Ciudad Juárez

Video footage has captured a man exacting revenge on an armed robber during a raid on a shopping centre in Ciudad Juárez.

A policeman was killed in the shootout at the Galerías Tec shopping centre and one of the robbers left severely wounded at the entrance. A local man seized the moment, violently punching and kicking the gunman as he lay dying — an expression of the anger felt by many residents of this besieged city.

The incident occurred on the eve of a visit to Mexico today by Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State. She will meet Patricia Espinosa, the country's Foreign Secretary, to discuss joint operations against drug crime.

Mrs Clinton will be keen to brush aside revelations from WikiLeaks that showed Washington's frustration with the inability of President Calderón to combat organised crime.

She angered Mexico in September when she told the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington that Mexico was looking "more and more like Colombia looked 20 years ago".

President Obama rejected the comparison. He said: "Mexico is a vast and progressive democracy, you cannot compare what is happening in Mexico with what happened in Colombia 20 years ago."

Mexico claimed that its problems were less political. It also hit back with mention of the "gigantic demand for drugs in the United States".

Tensions run both ways. A sign on the Mexico border in El Paso, Texas, reads: "Entry of firearms into Mexico prohibited." About 90 per cent of arms used in Mexico's drug wars are from north of the border.

There are about eight murders a day in Juárez. Drug crime is usually blamed but now criminals are disguising their offences as narcotics-related to take advantage of the impunity that the crimes receive.

The bodies in the shopping centre had been removed the next day and the walls painted — preventing any investigation into the local man's assault on the dying robber.

Aww, thanks guys.

YOUR HOME MAY BE REPOSSESSED IF YOU DO NOT KEEP UP REPAYMENTS ON YOUR MORTGAGE.

97% of our mortgage customers would recommend us to their friends. We say nice things about you too.

To apply for a mortgage with a great rate, call 0800 183 1331, or go to ingdirect.co.uk.

ING DIRECT

Saving feels good