

HELD IN DUBAI

Gillard urged to plead for Aussie

■ Nick Butterly
Canberra

Lawyers for a former WA man under house arrest in Dubai are calling for Prime Minister Julia Gillard to phone the powerful ruler of the city state to make a personal plea for his release.

One-time Perth property developer Matthew Joyce has been detained for more than three years in Dubai on fraud charges and faces sentencing on Sunday.

But his lawyers say a recent court ruling in Victoria turns the Dubai case on its head and should see Mr Joyce set free.

The former State manager of the Australand property group in Perth was arrested with colleague Marcus Lee as part of a government crackdown on land deals in the wake of a property market crash in Dubai.

Mr Joyce, who was working for Dubai state-owned developer Nakheel, was accused by Gold Coast property company Sunland Group of duping it into paying a \$14 million fee for control of a plot of land it did not control.

Mr Joyce and Mr Lee were jailed in Dubai where both men



House arrest: Matthew Joyce

claim to have been subjected to harsh treatment and to have witnessed rapes and murder.

The pair are now being held under house arrest and have had their passports confiscated. Mr Joyce's wife and his three children are with him in Dubai.

He is forbidden from working.

But late last week the same allegations were thrown out of the Victorian Supreme Court, with Justice Clyde Croft finding Sunland's case had "failed in all respects". Justice Croft also for-

warded his findings to regulator the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, asking it to investigate whether Sunland had breached corporate governance laws in some of its statements to the stock exchange.

The Australian lawyer for Mr Joyce, Martin Amad, said the Victorian findings would now be put before Dubai's Court of First Instance in the hope the judge would either throw out the case or reopen it.

Mr Amad said it was essential Ms Gillard phone Dubai's Prime Minister and monarch Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum to underline the significance of the Victorian findings.

"We are not asking her to interfere in a foreign legal system but to ring her counterpart," he said.

A spokesman for Foreign Affairs Minister Bob Carr said Australia was making representations to the Dubai Government on behalf of the two Australians.

A former prime minister, Malcolm Fraser, has also thrown his support behind the pair, warning Senator Carr needed to go to Dubai personally to plead for the release of the Australians.

