

Sunland execs ignore summons

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Sunland founder Soheil Abedian . . . 'when we receive an invitation, we definitely will let the shareholders know'.

Photo: Glenn Hunt

Patrick Durkin and Nick Lenaghan

Two senior executives of listed property developer Sunland are disputing they have been requested to attend a United Arab Emirates court to give evidence in a bribery case against two Australian businessmen detained in Dubai.

Sunland denies that chairman and founder Soheil Abedian and senior executive David Brown have ever been formally summoned to appear in the Dubai court.

The fate of two Australian property developers, Matthew Joyce and Marcus Lee – who are facing criminal charges of bribery and have been detained in Dubai for over four years – could be decided at a court hearing this week.

Australian embassy officials have confirmed that Judge Abdul Jawad requested Mr Brown and Mr Abedian be summoned to appear in his court, according to an Australian embassy document released in response to a freedom of information request.

The judge requested three witnesses be summoned on September 20 last year for an October 18 hearing, “two of those witnesses were named as Mr David Brown and Soheil Abedian”, the Australian Embassy in Abu Dhabi wrote.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard has personally intervened in the case by calling Dubai’s ruler, Sheik Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, following sustained pressure from former prime minister Malcolm Fraser and independent MPs Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor.

Despite confirmation from the Australian Embassy that the two Sunland executives have been asked to appear, Mr Abedian has previously been adamant that he has never received any such summons despite reports in the media.

“They have mentioned that Mr David Brown and myself will be called almost two months ago to come as a witness. Ironically the court was on 18th of October, not one single invitation was issued to us to come,” Mr Abedian told shareholders at their annual shareholder meeting in Brisbane on October 26.

“Is it a tactic? We don’t know. But when we receive an invitation, we definitely will let the shareholders know,” Mr Abedian said.

“As of today we have not received anything,” he said. According to Australian embassy officials, the judge renewed his order for prosecutors to summon the two men on October 18 – after the court was told they had not been contacted – and on November 12 the judge told the court that Mr Brown had now been summoned.

Lawyers for Mr Joyce have written to Sunland’s lawyers informing them that the Dubai court expects the two men to appear.

But a spokesman for Sunland maintained on Friday that the two men had still not received any formal summons to appear.

Mr Joyce and Mr Lee face up to 10 years’ jail on bribery charges arising from a failed \$40 billion property development on the Dubai waterfront.

The controversy erupted after listed Gold Coast developer Sunland Group claimed it was duped by Mr Joyce and his friend Angus Reed into paying a \$14 million “introductory fee” to secure land on the Dubai waterfront in 2007.

Last year, the Supreme Court of Victoria dismissed civil claims brought by Sunland against Mr Reed and Mr Joyce. Judge Clyde Croft asked the corporate regulator to investigate Sunland’s disclosures to the market over the scandal.

He also criticised the credibility of Sunland’s key witnesses, Mr Abedian and another executive.

Sunland has launched an appeal against the decision by the Supreme Court of Victoria, which is expected to be heard in April.

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