

Carr makes freedom call to UAE counterpart as Aussies face judgment

LEO SHANAHAN THE AUSTRALIAN JUNE 15, 2012 12:00AM

FOREIGN Minister Bob Carr has contacted his United Arab Emirates counterpart in a last-minute attempt to secure the freedom of two Australian businessmen held in a Dubai prison.

The Australian can reveal Senator Carr called UAE Foreign Minister Sheik Abdullah bin Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan on Wednesday night to express concern about the fate of Matthew Joyce and Marcus Lee, who have been held in Dubai since January 2009 on corruption charges and are facing years in prison. The two will face judgment and sentencing on Sunday.

They were arrested for allegedly duping property company Sunland Group out of a \$14 million "introductory fee" when they acted as middle men in securing a prime waterfront location for a property company in the failed Dubai Mark II development.

The hopes of the two men were boosted last week when the Victorian Supreme Court dismissed a civil case brought by Sunland against Mr Joyce and another Australian, Angus Reed, to recover the \$14m.

The Victorian civil case was based on the same facts as the Dubai criminal case.

Judge Clyde Croft found that the company had lied about whether any of its employers had been questioned by Dubai authorities, and described Sunland Middle East boss David Brown and its managing director, Soheil Abedian, as unreliable witnesses, referring the company to the Australian Securities & Investments Commission.

A spokesman for the Department of Foreign Affairs confirmed that Senator Carr had made direct contact with his UAE counterpart on the men's behalf. The Australian revealed yesterday that Australia's ambassador to the UAE, Pablo Kang, was urged to tell Canberra that Julia Gillard should contact the emirate's ruler to lobby for their release.

Mr Joyce yesterday thanked the Australian government for its help. "I am hopeful that the UAE authorities will consider the recent finding by the Supreme Court of Victoria that the two principal witnesses who gave evidence in my criminal case Dubai have been discredited," he said.