

# Rival Dawoodi Bohra leader may fight on

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**M**umbai: Taher Fakhruddin, son and successor to Khuzaima Qutbuddin, may challenge Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin's claim to be the spiritual head of one million Dawoodi Bohras. A few hours after news of Qutbuddin's death in California, US, came in on Thursday, a statement from his office said that Fakhruddin had been appointed the 54th Dai-al-Mutlaq (spiritual head) of the Bohras. Qutbuddin had challenged his nephew Saifuddin's claims to be the community's spiritual head in the Bombay high court. A source close to Qutbuddin's family said Fakhruddin may continue to challenge Saifuddin for the Syedna's post.

Ravi Kadam, who led the legal team appearing for Qutbuddin in the suit filed by him to be declared spiritual head, told TOI: "What is to happen to the litigation... the matter is on 22nd (April). Till then we'll see." But the source close to Qutbuddin's family said, "Since Taher Fakhruddin has already been declared spiritual head by the breakaway group, it is unlikely that he (Fakhruddin) will not challenge his uncle Mufaddal Saifuddin's claims to be the Syedna. I have heard that he is preparing the documents in the US and will soon send them to the lawyers in Mumbai, who represented his father in his fight to be declared spiritual head."

Qutbuddin had filed a suit to declare him 53rd spiritual head, saying he was privately anointed by his half-brother, the late Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin, on December 10, 1965. Among interim relief, he had sought restraint on Saifuddin from acting as the Syedna. Saifuddin claimed the nass (succession) was conferred on him on June 4, 2011, by his father, the 52nd Dai Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin, after the latter was hospitalised in London following a stroke.

Burhanuddin died on January 17, 2014, in Mumbai and a few hours after his death Qutbuddin claimed that the late Syedna had appointed him successor, which was immediately rejected by Mufaddal Saifuddin's supporters.

The trial commenced on April 27, 2015, with the cross-examination of Qutbuddin. But it remained incomplete and after a hiatus was to commence in April. Justice Gautam Patel, who was hearing the suit, had fixed April 22 and May 2 as fresh dates of the hearing.

Fearing attacks from followers of Saifuddin, Qutbuddin and his children left Saifee Mahal in Malabar Hill for his another house in Thane. Two of his daughters were married to sons of Mufaddal and his brother Qaid Johar Bhai. Qutbuddin's daughters took away their children (Mufaddal's group alleged she had kidnapped them) to the US. Subsequently, their marriage broke off. A US court restored the children to their fathers who live in Mumbai.

Meanwhile, it is not clear if Khuzaima Qutbuddin's body will be buried in the US or it will be brought here. An option, some said, was that he will get buried on the premises of his bungalow in Thane. It will attract his followers as it may become a pilgrimage site for members of the breakaway group.