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## HC judge bans phones in Syedna trial

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MUMBAI: A Bombay high court judge, who is conducting the trial in the succession row between Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin and his uncle Khuzaima Qutbuddin, has banned mobile phones in the courtroom. He, however, exempted advocates from the ban.

Qutbuddin has challenged his nephew's claim as the 53rd Dai or spiritual head of Dawoodi Bohras. The direction was passed by Justice Gautam Patel after he was informed by court staff that a person was seen taking a photograph of Qutbuddin while he was being cross-examined on August 4 by Saifuddin's advocate, just before the lunch recess. "It is unacceptable. I must safeguard the interests of the witness," said an angry Patel, when the court resumed post-lunch.

In his order passed in the chamber the same evening, Patel clarified that in this case special arrangements have been made for the video-recording of Qutbuddin's testimony.

"This was by agreement of both sides, having regard to certain special circumstances fully set out in previous orders. The matter is sensitive and affects an entire community," he added.

Senior advocates Iqbal Chagla and Ravi Kadam, appearing for Saifuddin and Qutbuddin respectively, agreed that clandestine and illicit taking of photographs in the court of witnesses cannot be permitted. "This is possibly even contempt of court and interference with the administration of justice," wrote Patel.

Patel directed that on all future dates of trial "except for advocates, no person will be permitted to bring a cell phone into the court hall where the trial is being conducted." The order added, "Should a photo- graph of the court proceedings or of the witness be found uploaded to any website, blog or any web-based service or social media, or transmitted or otherwise communicated, immediate action will be initiated."