

when smoke is detected, helping slow the spread of fire.

The role of an efficient and proactive fire department is equally vital. Fire safety inspectors should carry out mandatory inspections at least twice a year to ensure compliance with safety standards.

These inspections must be thorough, documented and enforceable. Inspectors should also provide basic training to shopkeepers and staff on how to use fire extinguishers, guide people to emergency exits, evacuate immediately without attempting to save belongings, and contact emergency services without delay. Fire engines with sufficient water supplies and ambulances must reach such incidents swiftly. Repeated tragedies have shown that these procedures are often poorly implemented, particularly in Karachi.

Unfortunately, the Gul Plaza fire highlights a recurring pattern of negligence by builders, property owners and regulatory authorities. Occupancy permits are routinely issued without full compliance, and violations are overlooked through indifference or compromise.

This negligence carries a human cost that the people of Pakistan can no longer afford. This is a moment for collective national responsibility. Citizens must refuse to live, work or shop in buildings that do not meet approved safety standards. At the same time, the government must enforce the law without exception, withhold occupancy permits until all fire safety requirements are met, and revoke licences where violations persist.

Public safety must never be negotiable. Real change is urgently needed, not only to prevent future tragedies, but to protect the life, dignity and future of the people.

Habib Hyder Laghari
Edmonton, Canada

Death traps

THE recent fire at Gul Plaza proves that most buildings in Karachi remain death traps, and that nothing would be done to ensure that such incidents do not happen in the future. Of course, there are people in the government whose duty it is to ensure that buildings are constructed with adequate safety precautions and have at least two emergency exits. There must be those who are required to visit such buildings periodically and ensure that fire prevention SOPs are being observed.

And we can be sure that, on paper at least, such officials have reported that all places they have inspected are safe, just as there are factory inspectors who never visit factories because they are paid to stay away and generate all-good reports.

That said, can everything be blamed on the government? What about the shopkeepers themselves? It has been many years since I last went to Gul Plaza, and I saw that many shopkeepers had kept their

goods in the passages leading to the exits. This would have made it very difficult for their customers to quickly get out of the building in an emergency.

As for fire prevention measures, it is simply out of the question. Purchasing fire extinguishers and recharging them every six months is both time consuming and cumbersome. And, in any case, why waste one's money on frivolous things like fire prevention measures? Right?

Of course, if relevant inspectors had regularly visited the building and imposed fines on errant shopkeepers, this tragedy could have been avoided. But, then, such officials have only one thing in mind: how to speedily recover the money they have paid to get transferred to Karachi, and how to become millionaires in a couple of years. Absolutely tragic.

Shakir Lakhani
Karachi

Occupational safety

THE tragic fire at Gul Plaza in Karachi, which claimed several lives, injured many and caused huge financial losses, has once again exposed the poor state of occupational health and safety in Sindh. Although the Sindh Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2017, exists, its implementation remains weak and ineffective.

The council formed under the Act has failed to play an effective role, while most commercial plazas and markets continue to operate without basic safety measures. Besides, proper emergency exits, fire extinguishers and regular inspections are largely absent. The Sindh government must urgently implement the law in letter and in spirit. The Occupational Safety and Health Council should be made functional, health and safety inspectors should be appointed, and mandatory safety training and certification for shop-owners should be ensured to prevent such avoidable tragedies. Loss of life due to negligence is unacceptable, and things must not be allowed to continue this way.

Abdul Latif Junejo
Hyderabad

A city neglected

IT is devastating to see Karachi suffer. One often wonders why it is always Karachi. This city has given so much to the country, but it continues to be treated with disregard and disrespect. The recent fire at Gul Plaza has once again underlined the level of this administrative neglect. Only last year, a massive fire had erupted at the Millennium Mall, destroying more than 250 shops.

This time the number of shops gutted is way higher. According to firefighters, heavy smoke and lack of uninterrupted water supply had made it extremely difficult to control the earlier blaze quickly.

These incidents indicate a lack of proper checks and balances regarding the safety of occupants in buildings, including commercial malls. The relevant authorities appear indifferent, failing to ensure that buildings are equipped with emergency exits, fire alarms, firewalls, or other systematic safety measures that could save lives.

What is most troubling is that every time a tragedy occurs, the government suddenly realises that such issues exist and need attention. It is often the working class that bears the heaviest burden.

Despite paying taxes and adhering to regulations, citizens are frequently denied access to basic facilities, such as timely ambulance services, effective firefighting, and adequate policing.

Law and order in the city has weakened to the point where citizens are vulnerable to crimes, with incidents ranging from theft to violence over small possessions, such as mobile phones. Accountability remains minimal, leaving many to feel abandoned and forced to rely on self-help.

A city that contributes so much to the national economy deserves more than reactive sympathy. It deserves safety, protection and respect. Karachi's citizens cannot continue to bear these tragedies.

Isra Solangi
Karachi

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