

1. **laissez-faire** (noun) – French phrase literally means ‘allow to do or let do’; without government’s intervention; non-interference/non-involvement (of government).
2. **accountability** (noun) – responsibility, liability, answerability.
3. **chaos** (noun) – disorder, turmoil, confusion/disruption,
4. **leap** (verb) – jump, jump over, move quickly; hurry/rush.
5. **blazing** (adjective) – burning, flaming.
6. **bid** (noun) – attempt, effort, try.
7. **imprint** (verb) – fix, establish, stick/embed.
8. **consciousness** (noun) – awareness, knowledge, attention/observation.
9. **overpower** (verb) – crush, finish, quell/quash.
10. **urbanisation** (noun) – a process of creating urban areas.
11. **bred** past and past participle of **breed** (verb) – cause, create, produce.
12. **pursue** (verb) – engage in, conduct; continue with/carry on.
13. **abysmal** (adjective) – very badly, awful, terrible.
14. **periodically** (adverb) – at regular intervals.
15. **high-profile** (adjective) – most important, unavoidable, attracting much public attention.
16. **perish** (verb) – die, be killed, expire.
17. **persuade** (verb) – pressurize, coerce, coax/prompt.
18. **prolonged** (adjective) – continuous/ongoing, steady, uninterrupted.
19. **litigation** (noun) – legal process, legal proceeding, legal action.
20. **culpability** (noun) – guilt, blame/fault; responsibility.
21. **indifference** (noun) – disregard, neglect, lack of attention.
22. **comprehensive** (adjective) – inclusive, all-inclusive, complete.
23. **ultimately** (adverb) – eventually, in the end, essentially.
24. **no tolerance** (noun) – zero tolerance; a (complete) refusal to accept certain (bad/illicit) behavior.
25. **evasion** (noun) – dodging, bypassing/sidestepping, circumvention.
26. **enforcement** (noun) – imposition, implementation, execution.
27. **unwavering** (adjective) – steady, firm/resolute; steadfast/sustained.
28. **compliance** with (noun) – adherence to, conformity to, accordance with.

## Fire and laissez-faire: fix accountability for Surat tragedy

### Fix accountability for Surat tragedy, and update the fire safety protocol countrywide

The deadly fire in a Surat coaching centre that resulted in the **death of 22 young people** highlights the gap between India’s dreamy visions of smart cities and the cruel reality of urban chaos and lawlessness. Images of students leaping from the blazing building in a bid to escape will remain imprinted on the public consciousness; many more teenagers were hopelessly overpowered by the flames within the premises, while a lucky

few escaped with their lives. These young Indians are the latest victims of a culture of laissez-faire urbanisation that city governments have bred and which the courts allow to be pursued without severe penalties. India's abysmal record on fire safety is reflected in the death of 17,700 people countrywide in fires in both public and residential buildings during 2015, according to the latest available data from the National Crime Records Bureau. Periodically, high-profile cases such as the [Uphaar cinema blaze in Delhi that killed 59 people](#) in 1997, and the [Kumbakonam school fire in Tamil Nadu in 2004](#) in which 94 children perished shock the nation, but even these are not strong enough to persuade governments to make fire safety the priority it should be. Neither has prolonged, aggressive litigation by the affected families in the Uphaar case made a difference, because the criminal culpability of the administrative machinery and officials who sanctioned unsafe buildings, often in return for bribes, remains largely unaddressed.

The **Surat** fire cannot be called an accident, since there are reports of notices having been served to the builder on the risks, but not pursued by the Fire Department. Civic officials have displayed unforgivable indifference, since two deaths occurred in another coaching centre in the city late last year. That tragedy should have led to a comprehensive review of public buildings. The present inquiry into the disaster should go into any deviations from the sanctioned plan for the commercial building housing the coaching centre, and the role of urban planning officials in allowing it to come up. Ultimately, litigation on fire disasters goes to the courts, and it is essential for the judiciary to send out the message that there will be no tolerance to corruption and evasion in the enforcement of building rules and fire safety. Beyond suspending a few officials and filing cases against the building owners, there is a need to make an example of sanctioning and enforcement authorities. The unwavering message must be that Indians demand accountability. Mandating compulsory insurance for all public buildings against fire risk and public liability can bring about a change to the way architects and builders approach the question of safety, since the insurer would require a reduction of risk and compliance with building plans. At least, that would be a start to rewriting India's shameful record on fire safety.