Sir,

The Incident Command System (ICS) is a structure that favors a centralized response to any emergency situation, by utilizing the available personnel and resources. This system operates using five major functional areas: Command, Operation, Planning, Logistics and Finance/Administration. A sixth Intelligence/Investigations sector may be set up if the need arises. It establishes a hierarchy in which all decisions are executed with the knowledge and consent of an Incident Commander. Experience and management capabilities are some of the prerequisites that merit selection of an individual for this role. Figure 1 below depicts the typical chain of command in an ICS framework.

This system has been adapted by developed countries such as USA; but is lacking in low to middle income countries like Pakistan. Our nation’s response teams have been put to the test several times when struck by terrible natural calamities and dreadful bombing incidents. The earthquake of October 8, 2005, took approximately 75,000 lives and left an estimated 3.5 million people homeless. A more systematic utilization of available resources can facilitate improved casualty management, leading to lower death tolls and fewer injuries. It is rather unfortunate that we have not progressed on this front.

Literature has highlighted the usefulness of the ICS as a means of controlling the aftermath of disasters. The Netherlands implemented a regional trauma system, which substantially reduced the number of deaths due to casualty triage and efficient dispatch to healthcare facilities.

What we need is a centralized emergency response system that operates with all national resources, such as ambulance and fire safety under its belt. This will make it possible to generate a unified response to national emergencies. Our government should work with international collaborators to incorporate the ICS or at least an adaptation of the concept. In addition to this, emergency first response courses can be taught at school and college levels, because awareness among the general population can help save lives.

Governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations can work in tandem to better handle large-scale disasters. Effective use of mobile technology and basic messaging services can help bridge the communication gap between various operating bodies; hence, improving response time to those in need.

REFERENCES