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National Building Code of BIS for Safe Buildings

Indian subcontinent witnessed a massive earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale a few days back. Though this earthquake had its epicenter in Nepal, tremors were strongly felt in many states of India. The intense earthquake resulted in large scale destruction to life and property.

It is important to understand that loss of life during such natural calamities are not due to the calamity itself, but due to the badly planned, designed and constructed buildings which become a death trap for the people. The earthquake resistant design of structures taking into account seismic data from studies of Indian earthquakes has become essential, particularly in view of the intense construction activity all over the country. India's high earthquake risk and vulnerability is evident from the fact that about 59 percent of India's land mass could face moderate to severe earthquakes.

In this context, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has formulated a series of standards on earthquake resistant design and construction of buildings, including repair, retrofitting and seismic strengthening of the existing buildings. In particular, BIS has brought out the National Building Code of India (NBC) which gives comprehensive provisions for earthquake safe design and construction of buildings. The Code gives seismic zoning map of India which divides the country into four zones namely Zone II, Zone III, Zone IV and Zone V, the Zone II representing the least vulnerable and Zone V the most severely vulnerable. The Code provides the design provisions according to severity of the likely earthquake in the zone concerned where the building is to come up, apart from various other provisions to be utilized by the structural engineer in design of buildings.

The Code not only gives technical provisions to be utilized by the building professionals, including structural engineers but also gives detailed mechanism of implementation of such provisions through the building regulatory processes in place in the country. The need of the hour is to suitably adopt the NBC in framing the local building bye-laws, while utilizing its provisions copiously by the government construction departments, private construction agencies, consultants, all building professionals, and builders and developers. This would ensure that the buildings so constructed are safe in the event of an earthquake, thereby minimizing the loss to property and avoiding the loss of precious life. Moreover, property buyers should enquire whether the buildings being purchased by them have been designed by competent structural engineers and are in accordance with the NBC and the Indian Standards on earthquake engineering formulated by BIS.

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