

Disasters Avoided

EARTHQUAKE-RESISTING BUILDINGS IN PAKISTAN

The importance of building codes

- Earthquake-resisting building codes work when they are properly enforced.
- In Quetta, Pakistan, 'earthquake-proof' buildings constructed after a devastating 1935 disaster performed well during the next major earthquake, in 1955.

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Image caption: Kabari Market after the earthquake (photo: By HIRO (possibly John Ernest Brown), 1935 - Unknown source, Public Domain, [via Wikimedia](#)).



In 1935 an earthquake destroyed the city of Quetta, now in western Pakistan. It killed around 30,000 people. The colonial government (of British India) tore down all remaining structures and imposed a seismic building code during reconstruction. The code mandated the use of reinforced materials and restricted the heights of some buildings. This was the only time that the colonial government in India attempted to impose earthquake-resisting standards on an entire city, including privately-owned land. Officials checked plans and made inspections to ensure compliance.

Another deadly earthquake struck Quetta in 1955, after Pakistani independence. The post-1935 buildings performed well: most of the damage was to the unreinforced walls of compounds rather than to buildings themselves. Although the maximum intensity felt at the ground reached VII on the modified Mercalli scale (compared with VIII in 1935), only a handful of people were killed.

Sources:

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