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## **8 months on, final notification on building code yet to be cleared**

Nearly eight months after a team of experts drafted a set of rules in the form of a building code to make important structures and newly-constructed public buildings in the city resistant to bomb blasts, the final notification making it mandatory for builders to follow the code awaits a clearance from the chief minister. The government, meanwhile, has been under pressure from builders who believe the rules are unrealistic and too expensive to implement.

The Security Control rules, prepared three months after the 26/11 terror attack, require public buildings to be constructed with blast-resistant designs, bulletproof glasses and security outposts, with no basement parking and with mandatory armouring of exposed columns with steel plates. However, builders have been reluctant to implement these rules, considering the high cost of designing and implementing these added surveillance measures.

“There was pressure from builders to relax these norms as they would add to the construction cost. The chief minister, therefore, wanted to take a fresh look at these norms before signing on the final notification,” a senior government official said.

The committee, headed by retired bureaucrat NV Merani and including

representatives from the Army, BARC, ATS, Fire Brigade and structural engineers, was directed to submit its guidelines early in the wake of the 26/11 terror attacks so that the rules could be implemented immediately. However, the main suggestions seemed impractical to builders and these include security outposts, latest electronic surveillance, no more than two entry points (separate for people and material), prevention of direct movement of vehicles in the approach to buildings, display of maps of exit routes within the building for evacuation, two-metre-high compound walls, a standoff point nine metres away from buildings where vehicles should drop visitors and armouring of exposed columns with 12 mm steel.

Signing on the notification would also mean an amendment to the Development Control Rule 37 (1AA). The rules would be applicable to new private and public buildings that have a builtup area exceeding 10,000 sq m or occupancy over 1,000, including institutional buildings, registered trusts, hospitals, schools, colleges, semi-government structures, prisons and courts. Shopping malls, markets, religious buildings, large hotels, monuments, tourist places and business buildings will also fall under these rules.

Officials, however, said the government was serious about implementation of the rules and the notification would be signed as soon as the new government took charge.

Builder Niranjan Hiranandani, however, said these rules were impractical and misconceived. "Additional safety of a building cannot be diluted but the rules have to be pragmatic and not unrealistic.

Implementation of these rules will not just be expensive but will also require additional police force for the security outpost.”

Though suggestions and objections to the rules were invited from the public in March, the BMC officials said no proposal had been recommended to follow the security guidelines. “The police commissioner will take the final call on which buildings need to follow the rules and to what extent, depending on their threat category,” Merani said.