

ic Party officials have said they think the SDPJ's past stance that the SDF is unconstitutional played a part in the tardy dispatch of troops.

Traditional Socialist attitudes about the wielding of power also apparently played a part in the government's refusal to set up a special task force headed by the prime minister in accordance with Article 125 of the Basic Law of Disaster Response.

The article grants the prime minister wide authority, including control of economic activities, the SDF, police, firefighters and the Maritime Safety Agency.

Igarashi said that under the current situation, such a task force, in a nationwide

disturbance, would give the prime minister too much power to restrict the rights of the people.

"To deal with national emergencies, critics say the nation should create a centralized organization under the prime minister's direct command that can instruct in relief and reconstruction operations.

"It is urgently important that a system be set up in which a single organization can make swift decisions by taking over, if necessary, the responsibilities usually reserved for ministries or local governments during national emergencies," said Oizumi of Nihon University.

Such an organization should be modeled

after the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, which has centralized authority to coordinate rescue operations, aerial surveillance of disaster areas and financial assistance to survivors, he said.

While educating and training personnel would be important to make a Japanese version of FEMA effective, crisis control skills and knowledge from the private sector are also necessary, he said.

"Crisis management should not be stopped at the government level," Oizumi stressed, adding that everyone must deepen their ability to defend and help themselves and protect their lives and property.

People bring in relief goods for friends and family KYODO

