

GSDF deployment on Day 1 of the disaster

Source: Defense Agency

5:46 a.m.: Earthquake hits the Hanshin region

6:30 a.m.: The 10th and 13th divisions in Nagoya and Hiroshima and the 2nd Combined Brigade in Kagawa are put on special alert

7:14 a.m.: A GSDF OH-6 helicopter surveys Awaji Island

7:58 a.m.: 48 troops go to Hankyu Itami Station for emergency rescue efforts

8:20 a.m.: 206 troops go to Nishinomiya for emergency rescue efforts

10 a.m.: The governor of Hyogo officially asks the SDF for help

10:20 a.m.: Three scouts dispatched to Ichinomiya, Awaji Island, aboard a UH-1 helicopter

11 a.m.: Defense Agency sets up an ad hoc headquarters for relief work

11:02 a.m.: Three scouts of the 3rd Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion arrive on Awaji Island

1:10 p.m.: 215 troops from Himeji arrive at Nagata and Hyogo wards in Kobe

2 p.m.: 86 troops of the 2nd Combined Brigade head for Ichinomiya, Awaji Island

3 p.m.: 365 infantry troops leave Fukuchiyama, Kyoto Prefecture, for Oji Koen in Kobe

4 p.m.: 83 troops of the 3rd Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion leave Yao, Osaka Prefecture, for Awaji Island aboard four CH-47 helicopters

Relief troops were reinforced to 2,300 by the end of the day

(partial deployment) could be repeated if a big earthquake hits the southern Kanto region," a senior SDF officer said.

According to Defense Agency sources, agency programs for coping with strong earthquakes in the southern Kanto or Tokai regions — the only such SDF programs — do not spell out how information would be gathered.

Seismologists have long predicted that a large earthquake will hit the two regions within a decade. They expect the magnitude to approach that of the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. According to the SDF plan for the southern Kanto region, in the event of a major earthquake, the GSDF would mobilize 22,300 troops of the Eastern District Army and the Maritime Self-Defense Force would dispatch between 40 and 62 ships for rescue missions in the early stages.

But the programs do not specify how the GSDF and MSDF would gather infor-

However, apart from the approximately 2,000 SDF members who take part in quake drills for the southern Kanto and Tokai regions, only a small number of soldiers participate in drills in the rest of the country.

Last year, excluding the southern Kanto and Tokai drills, only about 1,200 GSDF members participated in drills, or an average of only 25 troops in each of the 47 prefectures, according to the GSDF.

These drills are the only disaster drills the Defense Agency organizes with local governments. A third category of drills are carried out by individual local regiments and municipal governments on a small scale, without involving the large number of local government officials or police officers that would be necessary to cope with a big disaster like the Hanshin quake.

By law, however, prefectural and municipal governments, and not the SDF, are

mation necessary to judge the degree of damage. They also do not indicate how the number of SDF troops mobilized for relief activities in the early stages would be determined, according to GSDF and MSDF sources.

"They just say that the SDF will exert 'every possible means' to gather information. No further details have been given," one of the sources said.

Local and municipal governments carry out disaster drills annually in cooperation with police, firefighters and the SDF during Disaster Prevention Week in the beginning of September.

in charge of disaster relief programs.

The SDF can only "assist" in relief activities launched by local governments, police and firefighters, according to the law. Local governments are responsible for planning disaster drills.

"We can only participate if a local government invites us. We do just what we are asked to do in drills. Without the initiative of local governments, we cannot do anything," a senior GSDF officer said.

Every year, the Hyogo Prefectural Government conducts disaster drills with a relief force of about 2,000, including firefighters as well as members of the Fire Defense Agency, police, the SDF and other organizations.

The city of Kobe, however, which suffered the most severe quake damage, did not invite the SDF to participate in its past annual disaster drills.

According to a Hyogo Prefectural Government source who asked for anonymity, the annual drill did not include an exchange of information between police, firefighters and the SDF — a prerequisite, for mobilizing GSDF troops, in Gen. Matsushima's view.

"Representatives (from the three parties) all sat close to each other in the drill headquarters. All procedures had been decided on in advance. There is no training (for communicating among the three parties)," the source said.

On Aug. 4, about 50 SDF members took part in the drill.

SDF officials also claim that many local governments have hesitated to invite the SDF because of the governments' tendency to regard the SDF as unconstitutional.

The earthquake also revealed the SDF's apparent lack of rescue equipment.

The annual defense budget is ¥4.7 trillion. But, apart from minor purchases including, for example, 1,000 radio transceivers for communicating with local governments and police, no money has been allocated for disaster equipment.

Some SDF officials say other ministries have all the necessary equipment for rescue work. Others say the Finance Ministry will not allow the SDF to have equipment that is not earmarked for their main mission — national defense.