

第4部 課題

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第17回 毎日パソコン入力コンクール 6月大会

【課題】 第4部 英文B

More support needed for rebuilding disaster victims' homes

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Editorial: More support needed for rebuilding disaster victims' homes 


There is obviously no end to seismic activity across the Japanese archipelago, with last year alone ^{↓10級} seeing powerful earthquakes striking ^{↓8級} Kumamoto Prefecture in April and a temblor ^{↓5級} measuring lower 6 on the Japanese seismic scale of 7 rattling ^{↓3級} Tottori Prefecture in October. As many residents were left ^{↓準2級} evacuated over a prolonged period of time, it is of utmost importance to secure stable ^{↓準1級} accommodation in order to help rebuild disaster victims' lives. 


Jan. 17 marks the 22nd anniversary of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, which damaged some 640,000 houses and left up to around 310,000 people evacuated at shelters. Public assistance for residents to recover their livelihoods that were lost to the disaster was called for, and the Act on Support for ^{↓1級} Reconstructing Livelihoods of Disaster Victims was passed in 1998 at the initiative of lawmakers. 


The allowance was initially set at a maximum 1 million yen per household, far short of the cost to rebuild housing. The amount was subsequently raised to a maximum 3 million yen, and after the 2004 Chuetsu Earthquake and other disasters, the restrictions on the usage of such funds were eliminated and application procedures were simplified. 

However, there are continuous calls for improving the system from among disaster victims and affected local governments. The allowance is basically paid to households whose residences were either completely destroyed or partially destroyed to a degree requiring major repair work, and municipal governments are tasked


with assessing the damage. However, it is difficult to draw a line between "partially destroyed" and "partially destroyed to a degree requiring large-scale repairing." 


Tottori Prefecture and other local bodies have developed their own subsidy schemes and forked out allowances to households whose homes were partially damaged. In the wake of the Kumamoto earthquakes, some local governments provided subsidies to households whose housing units were partially damaged. According to a Mainichi Shimbun survey on local governments that were affected in the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, as well as by heavy rainfall in the Kanto and Tohoku regions in 2015 and by the 2016 Kumamoto earthquakes, the most common opinion was for households whose homes were partially destroyed to be eligible for public allowances. In one past disaster, there were cases in which the cost for repairing a home topped 5 million yen even though the structure had been partially damaged. 


Although local bodies have limits to their financial resources, disaster areas won't be able to recover unless housing reconstruction makes headway. Local governments are urged to look into a system that can flexibly provide relief to affected households even if their homes were partially damaged, in correspondence to their degree of damage. 

In the wake of the major fire in Itoigawa, Niigata Prefecture, in December last year, the central government decided to apply the disaster victims support law to the area after concluding that the extensive damage was caused by strong winds spreading the fire. Such flexible administration of the law is something that needs to be respected down the road. 

It is also essential to make housing units quake resistant in order to prepare for large temblors. About 80 percent of victims

in the Great Hanshin Earthquake were crushed or choked to death due to the collapse of buildings. It is believed that damage could be drastically reduced if all structures were made quake resistant ahead of a potential Nankai Trough megaquake and a major tremor hitting directly beneath the Tokyo metropolitan area. 

Approximately 82 percent of all houses across Japan have been rendered quakeproof, while the figure for local government office buildings — which should serve as disaster prevention hubs — stands lower at around 75 percent. In the Kumamoto earthquakes, a designated evacuation shelter was shut down after its walls collapsed. It is an urgent task to make such facilities seismic resistant. 

The rate of households with quake insurance policies remains at around 30 percent. In Hyogo Prefecture, which was devastated by the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, the rate of households that have signed up for a mutual aid system for housing reconstruction stands at a mere 9.5 percent. 

On top of enhancing public assistance for disaster victims, it is urged to raise awareness among residents about protecting their own lives and property.
