

Proactive Preparation for Earthquake Hazards

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The 6.4-magnitude Jiasian Earthquake again struck severely the August 8th Flood disaster area in Kaohsiung, and many in southern Taiwan could imagine the life-threatening effect of earthquakes. This is another over the 5-magnitude major earthquake succeeding the Haiti and Chile earthquakes in 2010. Along with these repeated quakes came a sense of crisis in many countries. Facing this reality, Taiwan should take more proactive preparations.



Not long ago, David Wald, a seismologist with the U.S. Geological Survey, predicted that in a near future the next Big One could strike Tokyo, Cairo, and Los Angeles, all located on a seismic belt. Taiwan, an island adjacent to continent in the circum-Pacific seismic zone, is a by-product of plate collision, and naturally is seismically active. Past experiences show that catastrophes (including natural disasters and manmade hazards such as huge earthquakes and typhoons) cannot be predicted for all practical reasons. Hence all nations are working on their disaster prevention plans to lower risks.

In this regard, many governments have included allocation of resources for risk management and strengthening disaster prevention and relief systems in their policy plan. But Taiwan appeared to be moving in the opposite direction and not putting sufficient emphasis on risk distribution or resource allocation.

Catastrophes in our mental pictures may not induce immediate panic, but could arouse anxiety in many, owing to the risks and gaps existing in the current prediction, warning, prevention and relief efforts, the limitations of scientific prediction or problem solving. Not long ago, Taiwanese scholars also predicted that due to global warming, the Taipei basin might be devastated. Some even suggested to relocate the capital. However, capital relocation is a far-reaching decision requiring careful analysis. But the concentrated risks arising from resource concentration is an immediate headache that we must tackle now. To further reduce risks, we especially need to proactively plan for supplementary measures.

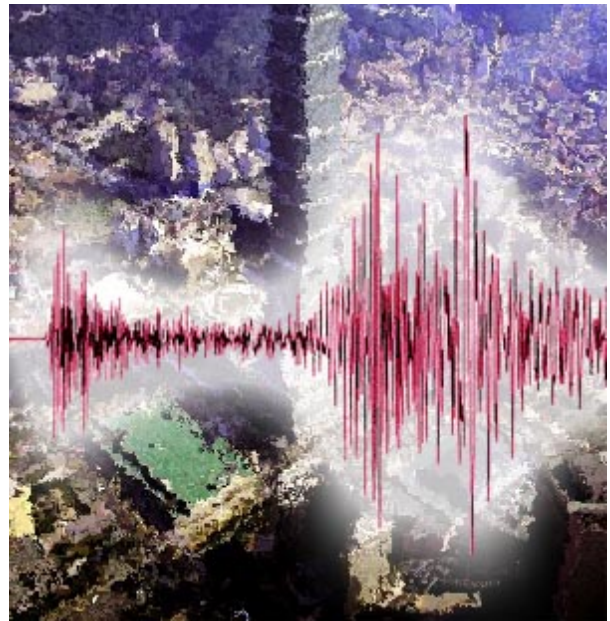
Currently Taipei is Taiwan's hub of politics, economy, finance, industry, culture, media, etc., and the grand Taipei area has been paying for over development. Moreover, Taipei dominates Taiwan's development, while southern and eastern Taiwan are neglected. Most importantly, as a result of resource concentration, Taiwan will be devastated once catastrophes hit Taipei. The problem is worsening during recent years.

While Taipei gathers most resources, it gathers most risks, making it more vulnerable and skewing Taiwan's development. We know that the New York City is the U.S. and world economy and financial capital, while Washington D.C. is the U.S. and world political capital. In mainland China, it is similar: Peking being the political capital and Shanghai being the economy and financial



capital. In Japan, major cities such as Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka all have their special functions. From this perspective, it is reasonable and urgent to consider the issue of relocating parts of the central government departments and agencies to southern Taiwan.

Especially while the central government is rigorously facilitating governmental restructuring, it is high time to combine and create development visions (for the five major cities). We should not repeat the instance happened some years ago that after an intensive discussion on relocating central government departments and agencies to the south, only (a portion of the staff) in the Fisheries Agency moved to Kaohsiung reluctantly.



In realistic terms, each area of Taiwan has its unique culture or industrial characteristics, but the central government should invest resources to assist local governments to develop regional governance characteristics. And one of the best approaches to invest resources is to relocate some central departments and agencies to those areas.

For example, the Kaohsiung metropolitan can be developed into Taiwan's technology industry and marine (or fishery) hub (due to the irreplaceable weight rooted by the long-term development of the heavy industries in Kaohsiung); the Taichung metropolitan can be developed into Taiwan's resource integration and coordination hub (due to its transportation convenience derived from the centered location); the grand Tainan area can be developed into Taiwan's culture hub (due to Tainan's being the historical capital town and preserving many precious Taiwanese cultural heritages), and eastern Taiwan can be developed into Taiwan's environmental and ecology hub.

The domestic and foreign catastrophes addressed the urgency for Taiwan's central government (including the legislators) to apply serious concern for resource allocation and risk distribution issues. Highlighting such issues will not only balance regional development, but also prevent risk concentration resulted from overly concentrated resources.

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