Everything was

while bearing daily expenditures is an uphill task now. I don't know how I'll pay rent," he said.

Munira Begum, a 45-year-old domestic staff in Jigatola, used to work for five families. Her employers fired her in the middle of the month.

"Of the five families I worked for, only two paid the entire month's salary of Tk 1,500. The three other families has not paid yet," she said.

"Two of my employers said they themselves faced economic hardship due to coronavirus," said the widow.

"I have to pay Tk 2,200 in rent. The landlord would not hear about my misfortune. How will I feed my three

children in the coming days?" Munira and three other domestic staffwere roaming about at Notun Rasta in Jigatola area yesterday asking people for food or alms.

Another rickshaw puller, Shafiq, said he left home with his rickshaw around 3:00pm as he heard that law enforcers harass people on the street in the morning.

"There is hardly anybody on the road now, I earned only Tk 100," he said around 11:00pm on Saturday.

"How will my family of four survive if the present situation persists?" he

Boatmen at Sadarghat Launch Terminal have been facing similar challenges. Over a couple of thousand

Ranjan Mia, a dinghy owner, said he used to earn Tk 500-700 a day. But he has been making at most Tk 150

The federation's acting president Shajahan Khan and General Secretary Osman Ali in a statement on Friday said around 50 lakh transport workers were rendered unemployed after the government suspended operation of

Most of these workers live from hand to mouth and they need support, Osman Ali told this newspaper last

"So, we demand that the

They also demanded a stimulus

"We will place the demands before the road transport and bridges ministry tomorrow [today]."

Hope battles despair

He said his cousin, Shamima Jeba, an expatriate living in Canada, initiated the programme through their social voluntary organisation "Prochesta", which has been working for marginalised people for several years with small projects involving health, hygiene and helping the poor towards self-sufficiency.

A Mirpur DOHS community-based group was seen helping 50 rickshawpullers in the area on Thursday.

"In this period of crisis, we distributed packs of groceries among 50 rickshaw-pullers in the area. A bag contains 3 kgs of rice, 1 kg potato, 1 litre oil, half kg lentil, half kg onion, half kg beaten rice, one soap, 10 paracetamol tablets and one mask," said Syed Ashiqul Islam, a resident of

When most are concerned about their hygiene to fight the coronavirus outbreak, poor people can hardly afford measures to safeguard

dwellers in Dhaka and Gaibandha.

The initiative was taken by Zoom Bangladesh, a small non-profit organisation which works for the

were provided food and other daily essentials in Dhanmondi, Hazaribagh and Russell Square areas, said Ramna police ADC Abdullah Hill Kafi.

"With everything shut down, the low-income people hardly have any income. So, this is just a little effort. Kafi said, adding that they bought these products with funds from an assistant police commissioner, several sub-inspectors and his own salary.

wealthy to help the people of low-

premises yesterday, "Shonge Achhi", a voluntary organisation distributed 150 bags of groceries among maids,

organisation. We raised funds from our few senior brothers and from a portion of our salary. We may not have much money like the rich people in the city. But we want to show how you can stand beside needy people even with small amounts of money," said Jashim Uddin Khan, a journalist and convener of the organisation, adding that the initiative will be running for

Meanwhile, the 50 police stations of the DMP have started locally distributing food among 2500 street children and poor people every day from yesterday until April 4.

A driver behind the wheel of a car was seen in front of Bashundhara City Shopping Complex around 1:30pm yesterday, and there were 40 packets

businessman Abu Ahmed Siddiqui in Dhanmondi, told me to distribute these among the needy people on the street. I came out with the car and am looking for some people who really

boatmen work on a daily basis between Postagola to Babubazar bridge areas.

over the last few days.

"Nobody cares about us," he said. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation, an alliance of transport worker unions, demanded rationing programmes for food and other essentials for the

public transport on March 26.

government launch a rationing system for transport workers. Each kg of rice for them should be Tk 10 and other essentials should also be cheaper for them," he added.

package for the transport sector.

themselves against the virus.

"Free for the poor people. Don't take more than necessary,"read a bannerhung over a table where hygiene products like hand sanitiser, soap, tissue, gloves, saline and washing people, street children and slum

unprivileged children.

Several members of Dhaka Metropolitan Police distributed food among 100 needy people on Thursday night, from their own funds.

Some 110 low-income families

Each package contained three kgs of rice, half kg of lentils, one kg potato, one kg onion, half litre oil and

The police officer called for the

In Dhaka Reporter's Unity day-labourers, street people yesterday.

"We are a very small social the next 10 days.

HOPE SPRINGS INDIVIDUALLY

of meals on his back seat. "My employer, the wife of a

distressed people. need food at this time," said Kamrul,

Kamrul said Siddiqui's father is also distributing meals among 100 day labourers every day.

Hashi Begum, a municipality cleaner of Dhaka North City Corporation, was walking near Saarc fountain in Karwan Bazar with a coworker. A car arrived and the man inside the car wanted to know what they were doing.

Having gotten her details, he gave them two bags of groceries.

"Now I have no worry for at least two days as my family doesn't have to starve," Hashi thanked the kind man and said such initiative would be a great help at this time for the people who live by hand to mouth.

Many flat owners and tenants have been barring their maids from coming to work for fear of the spread of coronavirus.

Azizur Rahman Faruk of Jhigatola, however, thought otherwise. He along with some other members of his apartment building, were packing 130 bags of groceries in the garage to distribute those among the maids in the area yesterday.

"I am doing this as part of social responsibility at this time of crisis. powder were kept for low-income This will help the quarantine process. Many wealthy people live in this city. I think, they should stress their hands | FROM | too," he said.

In front of Town Hall Bazar on Saturday afternoon, 50 bags of groceries were kept in front of a shop. The grocery shop owner Parvez told this correspondent that they got this order from a customer to pack those distributing among street people.

"In the last three days, four such customers bought grocery bags from my shop for distribution," he added.

On social media, people are posting their initiatives how they have been helping the community. Some people who were not able to help financially, came for another way to aware the community.

At a kitchen market in Khulna, a young girl Faima Rahman Jui along with two of her acquaintances marked spots with white color to stand in distance while buying groceries at the

"We had no money, no manpower. Only three people, we marked the spots before every shop so that people who came for shopping, can maintain social distancing," she wrote on

'Don't worry

donation for her relief and welfare fund from various government and private organisations through a videoconference from her official residence the Gonobhaban.

She said, "The Bangalee nation was never defeated [in past] and will also not be beaten [in future]. We'll have to

move with such self-confidence. "We're a victorious nation and we believe that we've the courage and strength to face any disaster."

The premier mentioned that the day-labourers, working class and lower middle income people were passing days in hardship as their sources of income have almost stopped due to

outbreak of the disease. She said that the government sent food grains to the deputy commissioners (DCs) through the Ministry of Relief and Disaster to distribute those among the poor and

"We're taking measures to provide foods and hand washing soaps for the people up to the union level ... the VGF and VGD programmes and other financial assistance that we provide to them will also continue," she said.



Bulldozers fill trucks with sand on the Someshwari river in Durgaur of Netrakona. Such mindless extraction is harming the river flow and ecology of the river. The photo was taken recently.

During the rainy season, dredgers are brought close to the riverbank for sand lifting, threatening the adjacent areas with erosion, said a businessman of Teribazar area of Durgapur town.

With the aim of ending this illegal practice, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) filed a writ petition with a High Court bench in

In response, the HC on July 2015 issued a rule upon the government asking why the leasing out of balumahals in the river shall not be declared illegal. The court also ruled why the

government shall not be directed to declare Someshwari an ecologically critical area. In addition, it directed the local administration to regulate and

monitor sand lifting in the leased-out areas so that no damage occurs to the river and its ecology.

The HC also directed the local administration to assess the impact of

sand lifting on the river. The court directives are yet to be implemented. The unregulated lifting of sand through shallow machines are posing a serious threat to the river, said locals and Bela officials.

"Hundreds of trucks move in the area, while many shallow machines are being continuously operated. These are clear evidence that the High Court order was not implemented," Bela Chief Executive Syeda Rizwana Hasan told The Daily Star last month.

Spillage of burnt lubricant and oil from shallow machines puts the river's traditional fishes like mohashol, kengra, bata, maitta, popa and baila,

Someshwari is being butchered

On December 30 last year, Bela organised a coordination meeting with locals at Birisiri auditorium in Durgapur to chalk out a plan to protect the river and the environment.

In the meeting, locals expressed their anger and said they had been organising different protest programmes -- including forming human chains and submission memorandums to the local administration -- for the past couple of years to stop indiscriminate sand lifting from the river.

But no action has so far been taken, they said. As a direct result, environmental

pollution in Durgapur municipal area has reached a severe stage. Hundreds of sand trucks ply this

area at all times, which both damages the road and cause large clouds of dust in the air. This correspondent while visiting the area last month was told by

locals that more than 600 trucks ply Mymensingh-Durgapur road daily, each truck carrying more than 30 Mamun Mia, a young truck driver from the adjacent Purbadhala upazila,

said the sand business is lucrative in Durgapur. For every truck, we have to pay Tk 9,500 for both sand and tolls. It is

sold at Tk 20,000 in Dhaka and the

rate increases with the distance.' Didarul Alam Tarafder, executive engineer of the Roads and Highways Department in Netrokona, said overloaded trucks were causing serious problems to the Mymensingh-

"The road has maximum capacity for vehicles loaded with 16 tonnes but truckers are carrying 30 to 40 tonnes of sand," he said.

"We have repeatedly informed the matter to the district administration and police. But no action has yet been taken against overloading," lamented the engineer.

A leaseholder, Anjon Sarker Liton, said, "We are collecting sand following the government instructions.

He denied violating rules. Assistant Commissioner Land) of Durgapur Ruel Sangma said the local administration has already stopped illegal sand and stone extraction from local canals and other water bodies.

He also warned of taking action against rule violators.

Contacted over phone, Netrokona's Deputy Commissioner Moinul Islam said he was not aware whether extracting sand after dusk was prohibited.

Asked about the High Court directives to assess the impact of sand lifting on the river, the DC said he did not know updated information on this. Mohammad Akhtaruzzaman, executive engineer of the Water Development Board (WDB) in Netrokona, said sand lifting would

not change the course of the river. The WDB official also claimed that more sand lifting will generate higher

revenues for the government.

An official of the Department of Environment in Netrakona, preferring not to be named, termed sand lifting 'absolute nonsense" and harmful to the river ecology, running a serious

risk of erosion.

Four die with

Friday, died yesterday morning, said Shoilendra Nath Biswas, in-charge of

"Although he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, he was kept under isolation as part of our precautionary measures. We have informed IEDCR about the death. But they [IEDCR officials told us that there was no need to collect samples of this patient," he

In Manikganj, a woman died with Corona symptoms at Munnu Medical College Hospital in Sadar upazila, SM Moniruzzaman, director of the hospital.

The victim's mother-in-law died with similar symptoms around a week ago and many people, including the woman, gathered at her funeral, he

The district's deputy commissioner SM Ferdous said family members and home quarantine after the death.

In Kishoreganj, a Saudi returnee, who was suspected to be infected with Coronavirus, fled from Shaheed Syed Nazrul Islam Medical College Hospital yesterday morning.

Three doctors and four staffs, who came in contact with the patient, were asked to remain in isolation. Kamal Hossain, 40, hailing from

a village under Hossainpur upazila, returned from Saudi Arabia a month ago, said Mohammad Helal Uddin, deputy director of the hospital. He came to the hospital with fever

and cough around 11:00am and when the duty doctor asked him to have some tests to check if he was infected with coronavirus, the patient suddenly started running and left the hospital compound in the blink of an eye, Helal said.

Contacted, civil surgeon of the

neighbours of the victim were kept in district Mujibur Rahman said he had asked authorities concerned to trace In Noakhali, four houses in Purbo

Charbata area of Subarnachar upazila

were put under lockdown by the local administration after a person was tested positive with Covid-19. In Rangpur, a patient, who was admitted to the isolation ward of

Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RMCH) along with his four other family members on Saturday night, alleged that they were not getting proper medical services. Faridul Islam Chowdhury, director

Star over the phone that an expert team was "providing treatment to them.' Our correspondents from Barishal Khulna, Manikgani, Mymensingh,

Noakhali and Dinajpur contributed

of RMCH, however, told The Daily

Know true extent

Yesterday, 73,134 such calls were made on three hotlines, but the IEDCR tested only 109 individuals for coronavirus infection

Abul Kalam Azad, director general

of the Directorate General of Health

Services (DGHS), said the large

number of phone calls does not mean that all wanted to undergo coronavirus tests. "People called to know about coronavirus, health problems and many other things. Yesterday, we analysed the sources of the calls and

found that the calls were made from

all the 64 districts. So, it is a positive

side that people are aware of the He, however, could not say how many calls were made to request for

corona tests. A large number of people with virus-like symptoms are struggling to get tested. Besides, there have been reports of deaths of several people who had virus-like symptoms. In the last one week, this newspaper found at least seven such cases in Bogura, Sylhet, Mymensingh and Rajshahi.

At a press briefing through video conference yesterday, Health Minister Zahid Maleque dismissed the necessity of carrying out widespread testing and a survey to know the scale of virus transmission. Experts, however, disagreed, and

said community transmission is going

"If the situation was like what the IEDCR is saying, it would be very good news for us. However, the [IEDCR's] claim is based on a very small number of tests and it [the claim] is unscientific," said Prof Nazrul Islam, a virologist and former Vice Chancellor Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib

The system has not really been revved up to what we need right now. To break the chain of virus transmission, the government should

increase its capacity to test and detect

Medical University.

cases without delay, he noted. "It [limited testing] gives a false sense of security. It seems the whole mechanism is working on a very limited scale."

If the data provided by the IEDCR turns out to be incorrect, the transmission in communities will go on, the virologist said, adding, "We will see a sudden rise in cases and we will be at a loss about what to do.'

He said the government is not providing correct information about the number of test kits it has at "If we had run tests on most of

"As an epidemiologist, I would say

the returnees and found only a few positive cases, then it could be a reason for optimism. But that didn't happen; there are not enough kits for Seeking anonymity, an expert said,

virus transmission is there, and it is going on.'

We need to analyse the deaths in hospitals and communities, run tests at the community level and expand the scope of testing to understand the real situation."

"We are not searching for the

cases the way we should have been. That's why we are not getting the real Though the authorities have taken some measures to expand testing

mentioned. In the US, the number of confirmed cases was 53 around 40 days after the first case was reported on Jan 21. After that, it saw big jumps in the number

facilities, it is already late, the expert

every day. As of March 27, the US recorded 103,321 cases.

Spain also is facing a similar crisis

"delayed" response from the

authorities. The country reported its first case on February 1, and the number of cases went up to 45 within 31 days. And then it saw 1,000 cases in just 10 days. As of March 28, the total number

of confirmed cases crossed 64,000. On the other hand, South Korea is a glaring example of how a country can contain the spread of the virus through widespread testing. Nearly 20,000 people were tested for coronavirus a day, more people per capita than anywhere else in the world.

Global

to come as governments roll out new containment measures and rescue packages aimed a staunching the bloodletting of economies

everywhere. In Britain, deaths have now topped 1,000 as Prime Minister Boris Johnson -- who tested positive for the virus last week -- warned that dark days were on the horizon.

"We know things will get worse before they get better," Johnson, who said he has only mild symptoms, wrote in a leaflet sent to all UK households explaining how to help

limit the spread. While Johnson initially said the shutdown would last three weeks, a leading expert warned it could be in

place until June. "We're going to have to keep these measures in place, in my view, for a significant period of time -- probably until the end of May, maybe even early June," Professor Neil Ferguson of Imperial College London, one of the epidemiologists advising the government, told the Sunday Times.

The carnage in worst-hit Italy and Spain suggests quarantine measures are unlikely to be lifted anytime soon, despite their devastating impacts on

On the Italian island of Sicily, police with batons and guns moved to protect supermarkets after reports of looting by locals who could no longer afford food.

"We have no money to pay, we have to eat," someone reportedly shouted at the cashiers in a Palermo supermarket, according to La Repubblica newspaper.

Spain has toughened an already ight nationwide lockdown by halting all non-essential activities. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani

said the country must prepare to adjust to "the new way of life" for a long time, after 123 more deaths were In the ground zero-city of Wuhan, however, life is creeping back to normal. Officials say the biggest threat

to public health is now imported cases.

Beijing, which is revising its role in

the coronavirus saga by coming to the aid of countries now on the frontlines, claims success in suppressing the virus at home. Official figures now routinely showing no new domestic infections

but dozens of imported cases each

day, shifting the country's prevention effort to the external threat. With the pandemic sweeping westward, the United States is home to the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 infections globally with

more than 124,000 cases, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally. As states impose a patchwork of measures, President Trump sowed confusion over the weekend by backpeddling on a proposal to impose a broad lockdown on New York and its

"A quarantine will not be necessary," Trump tweeted eight hours after he stunned the New York metropolitan region -- the epicentre of the US outbreak -- with a proposal to place it under quarantine. Trump's reversal came on the same

day the US death toll topped 2,100,

neighbours.

more than doubling in just three days More than a quarter of the fatalities were in New York City. In Chicago, a less than one-year-old infant succumbed to the respiratory

disease on Saturday, an extremely rare case of juvenile death. Around the world more than 667,090 cases of the novel coronavirus have been officially declared since the outbreak began late last year,

Variations in testing regimes -- and delays in some countries -- mean the true number is likely far higher. As even rich countries struggle, aid groups warn the toll could be in the

millions in low-income countries and

war zones such as Syria and Yemen,

according to an AFP tally.

where healthcare systems are in tatters

the offer. He added that at least 5,000 beds could be set up in the ICCB and a business centre there for emergency use.

hand over the ICCB and the business centre to the army to convert those into a hospital immediately. Tayeb said Bashundhara Group

would provide necessary help to

According to him, the group will

the government in setting up the makeshift hospital. The ICCB is the only integrated and mega facility in the country that was built with a view to redefine the scope and standard of domestic service industry. It came into operation on

January 1, 2015. Tayeb said his organisation was also distributing relief materials, including rice, flour, oil, and lentil, to the lowincome people and it would continue

until the crisis was over. Virus crisis boosts Germany's centreright

AFP, Berlin

Angela Merkel's long-struggling conservatives have rebounded in the polls thanks to the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis and widespread faith in the outgoing German chancellor's ability to manage the upheaval.

Shaking off years of record-low popularity, Merkel's centre-right CDU/ CSU bloc is now enjoying approval ratings of around 32 to 35 percent, some six to seven points higher than just a few weeks ago.