

PHOTOGRAPH: SURESH K. PANDEY

Asif Rahman 54

A carpet-seller

ASIF RAHMAN, 54, a carpet-seller in Gurgaon, feels his son is more adversely affected by the Covid-induced restrictions than anyone else in his family. A football player, the son captained India in the Asia Cup. "Now, he goes to the field at 5 am every day, and plays by himself," says Asif. On the whole, the family, including wife and daughter, doesn't shop, eat out or go to cinema. They work from home. There are so many less avenues to spend on these days. "We have adapted to a new lifestyle by spending more time at the dining table," he confides.

Business, as anyone can guess, is down. A fancy client list doesn't matter. Asif's carpets adorn offices at the White House, Google, NASA and Pentagon; hotels under different banners such as Louis Vuitton (Paris and Cairo), Taj, Hyatt, Hilton and Marriott; retail spaces owned by Ratan Tata, K.P. Singh and Oman's billionaire Mohammad Al Zubair; and the personal yacht of the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. "It is challenging. Some of the best-skilled weavers who were with us for 16 years went home. We faced losses in our factories in Varanasi and Agra. Business came to a standstill," he explains.

Despite the financial crunch, Asif paid his workers and weavers. With a lump in his throat, he says, "Many were infected with Covid. We arranged hospital beds, oxygen and medicines. We went through sleepless nights, so that they survive. We kept paying our employees so that they shouldn't feel they were out of work." Clients like Versace were supportive due to long-term business links, but others cancelled their orders. It was a double whammy—income dried, many costs remained. "Now, we are trying to keep our nose above the water," he says. □

Lachmi Debi Roy