Speaking at the India International Leather Fair (IILF) 2010 in Chennai on February 2, VP Namrata Fenehan, said that she had been impressed by comments she had heard in reports from the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and the belief that they could apply to the leather industry.

He said: "I am pleased we are celebrating the silver jubilee of IILF this year, looking back on 25 successful years. But I am also pleased that we have entered the second decade of this millennium and are able to look forward to recovery from the worst recession we have ever known, at least since the 1930s. But the message from business leaders and economists at Davos was that leaving the recession behind is giving people the opportunity to re-think and re-design their businesses in the post-recession period, and the confirmed that the world's centre of gravity is shifting from west to east.

"This is important for the Indian finished leather industry. We will need to focus more on the domestic market, but for us as exporters, it means that we also need to look at other countries in Asia. Sri Lanka and other small Asian countries are beginning to be very important for the finished leather industry."

Official opening for ISA Tan Tec's Vietnam tannery

More than 350 guests attended the official opening of ISA Tan Tec's new 'eco' tannery in Vietnam at the end of January. Among the guests were Conrad Cappell, consul general of Germany, and Aneta Nikolova, environmental affairs officer at UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Social Affairs for Asia and the Pacific).

The team at the tannery, led by CEO Tom Schneider, hopes to set new standards in terms of environment and social responsibility as it produces leather at the site. It has found various ways to do this, including the use of renewable energy and making use of waste heat generated during production. A windmill is used to pump water and wastewater is cleaned in an engineered wetland and subsequently reused. The tannery also collects rainwater for use in production and water is heated in a solar thermal system that does not produce CO2 emissions. A half-open bamboo wall provides natural cooling and a pleasant temperature inside the production building.

"For many years, we have been working on the vision of fundamentally overhauling the leather production in a bid to make it green. We have now achieved that goal. With this tannery, we show how economic success goes hand-in-hand with ecologically and socially sustainable economic practices," says Mr Schneider.

At the new tannery, 250 employees will treat 20 million square-feet of leather each year for customers such as Timberland, New Balance, Kears, Patagonia and Merrell.

Mr Schneider added: "We know that many of our friends share our vision. Without the generous support of government officials from both international and local community, the science and financial sectors, we would not have been able to achieve our goals so fast and comprehensively."

More participants at IILF

According to organisers, more exhibitors are attending the India International Leather Fair this year compared with last year. The show opened on January 31 and will run until February 3 in Chennai.

According to Habib Hussain, chairman of the Council for Leather Exports (CLE), 1,800 exhibitors and 3,000 visitors were expected to attend the show, a 10% increase compared with last year. Habib believes this is a sign the country's leather sector is on the road to recovery after a five-year downturn.

Mr Hussain said the 8,400 square-metre exhibition area was the largest ever. More than 425 exhibitors are participating, including 172 from 24 other countries, including China, France, Germany, Italy and Thailand. A seminar program will also take place at the event with an increased emphasis on finished goods.

Chairman and managing director of the India Trade Promotion Organisation, Subba Puri, said there had been apprehensions about holding the fair at a time when the world leather market was struggling, but that the positive response from exhibitors had cleared those doubts.

Haiti tannery sets up relief fund

Haiti-based tannery Hansan Leather/Cuirs Haitian has set up a fund to help victims of the terrible earthquake that struck on January 12.

"Despite being at the epicentre of the quake, the tannery, and its staff were unharmed. It is really an incredible story, one of survival and hope and triumph amidst the tragedy," said co-owner and CFO, Ha Gallagher.

However, she points out that many people have been left homeless and with no work and have been left out of work and have been left out of work. An owner and CEO, Dan Gallagher, was on his way back from the tannery to his hotel when the earthquake struck. He was unhurt and was even able to get emergency aid to the tannery just seven days later after the border from the Dominican Republic.

The Cuirs Haitian Haiti Relief Fund aims to provide resources for the tannery's 100 workers and more than 100 hide skin collectors so that they and their families can start rebuilding their homes and lives.

"At Cuirs Haiti, we have truly been blessed to survive this tragedy with minimal damage, in view of the horrific destruction that surrounds our factory," Mr Gallagher said. "I had discussed with my wife during the week after setting up this fund. We are an integral part of this community and, understanding our culture, who better to get aid distributed through Cuirs Haitian. The destruction to our factory workers homes is just mind-boggling."

He continued: "Literally every day there is another tragic story and this will not change for the foreseeable future. Cuirs Haitian is here for a reason and we believe that is not just for trying to make the best possible leather for our customers, but also to provide aid in the relief effort."

Argentina falls behind

During the first six months of the 2009/10 cycle (July-December 2009), Argentinean exports of leather cuts to the European Union (EU) totalled just 3,325 tonnes, according to the country's national agriculture, food and health service (SENASA).

This accounts for just 12% of its annual quota, which means during the period January to June, it must export the remaining 24,675 tonnes or fall short of its sales quota.

Sales continue to climb at Tandy

Tandy Leather Factory has reported higher sales for January. Sales for the month were $4.5 million, up 3% compared with January 2009 sales.

Retail Leathercraft sales rose 8% to $2.3 million compared with $2.1 million the previous year. The 74 comparable stores' sales were up 9% for the month and the one store opened since January 2009 added sales of $16,000.

Wholesale Leathercraft posted sales of $2.1 million for January, up 1% from January 2009 sales of $2.1 million.

International Leathercraft, which comprises one store in the UK, reported January sales of $112,000, an 8% increase compared with $104,000 in January 2009. The UK store opened in February 2008 as a combination retail and wholesale store.

Chief executive officer and president, Jon Thomson, commented: "The positive sales trends continue in our wholesale and retail stores as we begin 2010. I am especially pleased with the wholesale stores as they have now had three consecutive months of sales gains. The January sales gains are back to the level of 2006 before the economy started to decline.

"Our UK store will be two years old in February and continues to generate consistent sales gains, which confirms my belief of the potential that exists beyond our borders if we can find the right people to manage stores."

Shannon Greene, chief financial officer added: "We are cautiously optimistic as we look forward into 2010 and are expecting 2010 sales to be higher than 2009 sales. Whether the economy will cooperate is difficult to predict with any certainty. Regardless, we are moving ahead with our expansion plans by analysing the potential of new markets as well as adding to the customer base in our existing stores."

Leather in top three US growth industries

According to the Institute for Supply Management (ISM), January marked the sixth consecutive month that economic activity expanded in the US manufacturing sector. The report also showed that the overall economy grew for the ninth consecutive month.