



## The Ansari vision

First, I would like to apologise that I will again focus on Bangladesh. I do this because the timing is crucial and critical. This article views things from a positive point of view. As you may have read over last month the first tanneries are preparing to move to the new industrial area by transferring old machines from Hazaribagh to Savar. The most important factor for the tanners, whom it would be difficult to describe as modern industrialists, is that whatever is done should cost as little as possible; this is their view, rather than seeing the shift as an opportunity to start from scratch and to start with a clean slate. On the other hand, this apparent start of the shift to Savar may be a smokescreen to make the government believe that the tanneries are serious about moving. Who knows.

Many organisations have tried to assist tannery owners by giving important information and assistance. One machine manufacturer held a symposium showing new technologies that aim at a clean environment, worker safety and savings of energy, chemicals and water. The symposium was very well attended, but the results in the medium term are quite disappointing because almost none of the tanneries is equipping themselves with quality or advanced equipment.

One of the participants, though, thought out of the box and already had clear ideas of what he wanted in terms of how to produce his leather in the new tanning area at Savar, what approach his company would have towards corporate social responsibility, the environment and how he could maximise yield. This month I wish to pay homage to the late Mohammad Rezaul Karim Ansari, founder and ex-CEO of Karim Leather Limited.

Mohammad Rezaul Karim Ansari's career started at just 17 years old when his father passed away. He was, as a consequence, catapulted to become the head of his family (which can trace its roots back to thirteenth century Medina, and comprised primarily either preachers or businessmen). He was obliged to set off to the city to make a living in order to support his family. Mr Ansari studied and worked for the remainder of his student life until he finished his degree in Islamic education discipline. In spite of his traditional education, Ansari was a man with modern ideas and he developed a fascination towards chemicals and started to explore the world of leather manufacturing and fell absolutely in love with the trade.

Ansari started Karim Leathers Limited in 1983 from scratch and steadily built it into a business that produces today four million square-feet of finished leather per month. He was a man with a vision. He knew what he wanted for himself, for his family, his company, his workers and the environment. This vision is now at the threshold of taking its first important steps towards realisation.

Mr Ansari was at the forefront of the sector at large in Bangladesh and his service to the country has been no less than exemplary. During the time the Bangladesh leather sector was still busy making crust for export and the



government was poised to shut down wet blue exports, Karim Leathers started to export finished leather to the global market. Today it exports 100% finished leathers worldwide, mainly to European finished product brands.

He chaired the Bangladesh Finished Leather & Leathergoods and Footwear Exporters' Association (BFLFEA) from 2002-2004 and from 2008-2010. During this time he led countless delegation teams representing the leather sector at home and abroad. He maintained strong links to the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), during and after his tenure as the chairman. It is worth mentioning that in the interests of the people of Dhaka, when the government started to hatch its plan to relocate the leather sector away from the expanding capital city, he became a driving force behind the proposed move to the new location at Savar. As chairman he was the vital person who created awareness among his colleagues that effluent treatment and social responsibility were not a luxury but a basis for the industry to build on.

For his own new factory in Savar he only wanted the best. Top-quality equipment, space, light and a worker-friendly environment, contrary to what was the daily fare in



Hazaribagh. He wanted automation and process control as well as state-of-the-art tanning drums and leather processing machines that would ensure energy and water savings with a responsible use of natural resources. He wanted enterprise resource planning software to run and control his production. Serious illness ended his active participation in this ambitious project, but the vision was transferred to his sons who have taken it upon themselves to make the vision come true. Before his illness got the better of him, Mr Ansari signed a memorandum of understanding for the new Karim Leathers facility in Savar, in which all his ideas and requirements are well documented.

A year after his death, the sector is now well on its way towards moving to the new location and has an opportunity to start afresh with state-of-the-art production plants, an opportunity to aim high with a keen eye on ecology and social responsibility. It is hoped that the sector will grab this opportunity to clean its house, because that is what buyers in Europe and the US want, recently highlighted by those who have pledged strong commitment to ensuring worker safety in the plants from which they source their textiles in Bangladesh.

Momtazul Karim Ansari Russel, one of the founder's sons, was empowered by his family and the board of directors, headed by Mr Ansari's widow, to continue his father's work and to set up "the best tannery in Bangladesh". To this purpose he signed an important contract with Hüni AG Process Controls for drums, automation and process control equipment during the Tanning Tech fair in Milan (Hüni said this was the most valuable contract it has signed in its near-300-year history). He also bought state-of-the-art equipment from suppliers such as Cartigliano, Persico, Gemata and Mosconi, just to name a few, making his tannery as far as is known, the best equipped and most advanced tannery in Bangladesh. Karim Leathers is aiming for its new tannery to achieve Leather Working Group gold status, nothing less.

Running a tannery is not just about producing leather. It also means being mentally capable of understanding that the environment and the wellbeing of workers are just as important as the bottom-line. Happy workers produce more and better; they make fewer mistakes. Respect for the environment will open doors to clients and consumers who are becoming more and more aware of corporate social responsibility in the production of the goods they buy.

Mr Ansari knew this and he and his family believe in being unselfish and in using their hard work and good fortune to help less fortunate people in their country. The Ansari family has used funds from revenues generated by the business to set up and run an orphanage and a school where approximately 2,000 children are looked after; fed and sheltered for free and 400 more have access to free education.

The above is a story to pay homage to an extraordinary man with an extraordinary vision, who was far ahead of where the leather industry stands at this moment in Bangladesh. Mohammad Rezaul Karim Ansari is an example to his peers: may his vision be a legacy for the Bangladeshi leather industry. 🌐



GET THE HIGHEST  
POSSIBLE ROI.  
NO BULL.

With the most advanced nesting engine ever created, Gerber's Taurus II maximizes hide yield and gets you the fastest return on your investment possible. Find out more at [gerbertechnology.com](http://gerbertechnology.com).

Reach your *optimum*.  GERBER  
**TAURUS II CUTTER**

VISIT US AT INTERZUM, COLOGNE, HALL 10.1, BOOTH # D60/EG1