

APLF HONG KONG 2026

SIGNALS 'GREAT RESET' AMID RESILIENT GLOBAL DEMAND

Report by Dipika Chopra

Hong Kong: At a time when global supply chains are under pressure and sustainability regulations are tightening their grip, APLF Leather & Materials 2026 delivered a clear, almost defiant message: the leather industry is not retreating—it is recalibrating.

Held from March 12-14 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, the three-day fair spanning over 22,000 sqm of gross exhibition space, the show brought together around 500 exhibitors from 36 countries and regions, alongside 19 group pavilions representing 15 nations, reinforcing its position as the world's most influential leather sourcing platform. More than a marketplace, APLF 2026 functioned as a live indicator of where the global leather and materials industry is heading—and how it is choosing to get there. There was a distinct mood across the halls. Not exuberant, not anxious—focused. The kind of focus that suggests an industry done reacting, and now actively redesigning itself.

From Correction to Calibration

If 2025 forced the industry into a reset, 2026 is where that reset is being operationalized. The headline figure—a 10.5% decline in global exports—only tells part of the story. On the ground, sourcing hasn't slowed; it has matured. Buyers are more deliberate, timelines are longer, and decisions are layered with compliance, traceability, and risk assessment. Impulse buying has given way to structured procurement. Speed, once king, now shares the throne with consistency and compliance. The industry, in many ways, is growing into its next phase.

Hong Kong: Stability in a Fragmented World

For over four decades, APLF has been anchored in Hong Kong—and in 2026, that choice feels more strategic than ever. In a global environment marked by shifting trade routes and geopolitical friction, Hong Kong continues to offer what businesses value most: predictability. With its open financial systems, efficient logistics, and direct access to





“The industry enters 2026 with a pragmatic outlook—focused on collaboration, efficiency, and long-term sustainability as the foundation for growth.”

Janice Lee, Director of APLF

“We connected with the right suppliers in a matter of hours. It compresses months of sourcing into days.”

Eleona, Importer from Italy

“The future of leather lies in traceability, transparency, and responsible innovation.”

Paul Bridge, Bureau Veritas

mainland China and Southeast Asia, the city remains the industry’s most dependable trading corridor. The scale and diversity of participation this year reaffirmed that confidence.

China Anchors, Southeast Asia Accelerates

China’s role remains foundational. Despite export corrections, it continues to dominate global leather production and trade, with volumes that no other country comes close to matching.

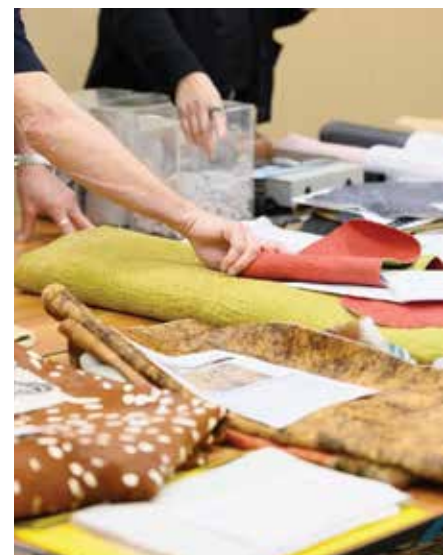
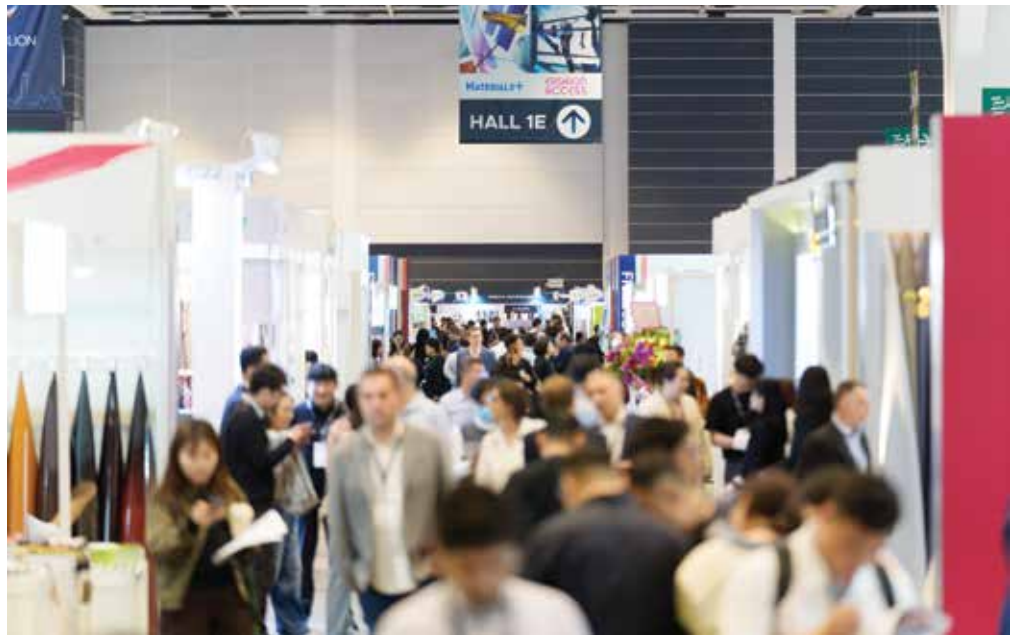
Yet the real momentum lies in the broader region.

- Vietnam has firmly transitioned into a global manufacturing hub, driven by trade agreements and sustained foreign investment.
- Indonesia is gaining ground as both a production base and a consumption market, supported by domestic demand and established tanning capabilities.

These markets are not just complementary—they are increasingly central to sourcing strategies. And APLF, positioned in Hong Kong, sits at the crossroads of this evolving regional ecosystem.

A Marketplace Without Silos

One of the most notable shifts at APLF 2026 was structural, not just strategic. For the first time, APLF Leather, Materials+, and Fashion Access were integrated on a single level, creating a seamless, end-to-





Dipika Chopra at the Press Conference



end sourcing environment. The impact was immediate and measurable. Buyers navigated faster. Exhibitors saw steadier engagement. Conversations extended beyond categories, linking raw materials, components, and finished goods into a single commercial narrative. In practical terms, the fair eliminated friction. And in today's market, friction is not just inconvenient—it's expensive.

Where Conversations Convert to Business

APLF 2026 distinguished itself not just through scale, but through outcomes. The business matching programme facilitated:

- 1,000 curated meetings
- Participation from 90+ buyers across 65 countries
- Near full attendance across sessions

For many, this structured approach delivered tangible efficiency. In an era increasingly dominated by digital communication, APLF reinforced the enduring value of face-to-face negotiation—where trust is built, not just transactions executed.

India: Rising with Realism

India's presence at APLF 2026 continued to expand, both in participation and perception. With 25 exhibitors, Indian companies showcased capabilities across leather, components, and finished goods. Feedback pointed to strong engagement, particularly from European and emerging market buyers. India's positioning is evolving—from a cost-driven sourcing destination to a value-driven, compliance-ready partner.

Sustainability Becomes Non-Negotiable

At APLF 2026, sustainability moved decisively from narrative to necessity.

Regulations such as the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) are now actively influencing sourcing decisions, pushing the industry toward higher levels of transparency and accountability.

A key development came from Japan, where the JLIA introduced dual certification frameworks:

- JLIA Sustainable Certification, focusing on ESG compliance
- Japan Eco Leather Certification, addressing material-level environmental and chemical safety

These initiatives aim to translate complex sustainability requirements into practical, verifiable standards—a shift welcomed by buyers navigating increasingly complex compliance landscapes.

Innovation and the Expanding Materials Narrative

The Materials+ segment underscored another critical shift—the broadening definition of materials innovation. From advanced components to hybrid solutions, exhibitors showcased products designed to meet both performance expectations and environmental benchmarks. A standout example was Coats Aquiline, a high-performance filler material combining durability with thermo-adhesive functionality—reflecting the industry's move toward technical sophistication alongside sustainability.

A Platform for Dialogue, Not Just Deals

Beyond the optimism, APLF 2026 did not shy away from uncomfortable realities.

Discussions around:

- Geopolitical disruptions affecting shipping routes
- Pricing volatility across supply chains
- Conflicting lifecycle assessments (LCA)
- And the growing competition from synthetic alternatives



Sunny Sangil Park, Elnore at the Bags Awards and cocktail

“We’re seeing more meaningful conversations, Buyers are asking about traceability, certifications, and long-term partnerships not just pricing.”

Sunny Sangil Park, Elnore

“Order conversions may take time But the intent is clear—and that’s what matters.”

Manpreet Singh, Bazaar Konnections

“The structured meetings made a significant difference. We were able to connect directly with suppliers aligned to our sourcing needs within a very short time frame.”

Shunsuke Takami, Trion Corporation



Alok Prakash, Director, Eltus Mode (Pierre Cardin India) and Amit Chopra at the breakfast meet



Deepu Virmani, Trends with at the breakfast meet

“The scale and diversity at APLF 2026 were impressive, with a noticeable shift towards commercially viable, trend-forward products. For large-format retail like ours, the fair offered valuable insights into upcoming materials and styles that can seamlessly translate into the Indian mass premium segment.”

**Deepu Virmani,
Reliance Trends**

“APLF remains one of the few platforms where you can meet serious manufacturers from multiple regions under one roof. It saves months of travel and uncertainty,”

Erik Illig, Wilhelm Textiles

“We saw strong footfall at our booth, especially from buyers looking for reliable sourcing partners. The quality conversations have been very encouraging,”

Nitasha Gill, Elements Exports

“APLF 2026 was highly productive in terms of both sourcing and relationship-building. There is a clear momentum towards quality enhancement and global competitiveness among Indian manufacturers. The exposure to international standards and innovations will play a key role in shaping our future collections.”

Saurabh Lamba, Director, Lamba Footwear

“APLF continues to be a vital platform for discovering new materials, trends and global sourcing opportunities. This year, we saw a strong emphasis on design innovation and sustainable solutions, which aligns well with the evolving expectations of the Indian consumer and international markets.”

Alok Prakash, Director, Eltus Mode (Pierre Cardin India)



were front and centre.

Perhaps the most striking statistic:

Up to 45% of hides still go to landfill.

This points to a deeper challenge—not just of supply and demand, but of perception and education. The industry must do more to communicate leather’s inherent advantages—durability, biodegradability, and longevity—in a market increasingly influenced by synthetic narratives. From the Leather Supply Chain Conference to the NextGen Materials Tech Talk and Education Day, the event created space for dialogue across stakeholders—manufacturers, brands, policymakers, and innovators. The message was consistent: collaboration is no longer optional; it is essential.

The Takeaway: Reset with Direction

As the fair concluded on March 14, the prevailing sentiment was clear—cautious optimism, grounded in strategy. Yes, challenges remain: Geopolitical uncertainty, Rising compliance costs and More cautious buyers. But the fundamentals of the industry remain intact. What APLF 2026 ultimately demonstrated is that the leather sector is not waiting for external stability. It is actively building systems, partnerships, and frameworks to operate within uncertainty.

Looking Ahead

The next edition of APLF, scheduled for March 31 – April 2, 2027, is expected to reflect a more structured, compliance-driven, and technologically integrated industry landscape.