"DIGITAL DESIGN DEVELOPMENT & COMMERCIALIZATION" is vital said Mr Robert Perkins, President of British Footwear Association (BFA) at a UK Footwear Market Place webinar organised by the Council for Leather Exports (CLE) today, 30th May 2020

‘Design & Fashion Studio’ of CSIR-CLRI was invited to participate and here is a short review: Mr Aqeel Ahmed Panaruna, Chairman, CLE traced the association of Leather Industry of UK and India to over 120 years. The Chairman mentioned that COVID 19 had brought in a financial catastrophe, but, at the same time, he added that the mood was not as depressing as it was some weeks back! There are positive signs of revival of economy said Mr Panaruna. Chairman, CLE impressed upon Mr Perkins and members of BFA that "India is the best destination" for both manufacturing and sourcing and that CLE looks forward to collaborating with BFA. Mr Aqeel said that Marks & Spencer’s and Clarks were the top selling UK brands in India and the Indian domestic market will boom in the near future.

In his opening remarks, Mr Robert Perkins with over 40 years of experience in the field said that he started working with Indian companies since mid-1980’s and his experience was largely good.

Presenting the current scenario in UK, Mr Perkins said that there would be a drop of 40-50% in sales of footwear and estimated a very very sharp decline. At the same time, Mr Perkins added that there was a 18% increase in online sales and a 2% increase in alcohol sales. The British Government has been very concerned and has introduced ‘furlough scheme’ where the government is paying 80% of earnings in excess of 8.5 million people and this scheme will continue until end of October. Businesses are expected to open in July and contribute to the scheme. President, BFA said that three months of Spring season is lost (March, April & May) and
the balance Spring merchandise would be difficult to sell in the next two months (June and July). This implies that SS 2020 merchandise will be carried forward to SS 21. Mr Perkins also said that some people will never return to high street as in the past as the consumer confidence will be low! A consumer visiting a store and touching 4-5 pairs of shoes and buying one pair implies that the balance pairs touched by the customer will have to be isolated for 72 hous! And it is because of this, online focused brands & retailers are winning. Mr Perkins alerted that the world was also looking at Indonesia and Ethiopia as alternate destinations to China.

Mr Robert Perkins wanted India to take note that "digital design development is vital" and factories need to develop new product ranges without travel!

In his concluding statement, President, BFA said that British Shoe Industry is resilient and despite the difficult period, BFA will find a way. Four factors are very important to Indian Shoe Companies, he said: Integrated supply chain, Commercialization, Infrastructure and Service Standards.

In the Q&A session, replying to Mr Muthukumaran of TATA International, Mr Perkins said that besides UK, Spain and Portugal too would start manufacturing shoes. And to a question from Mr Sunil Harjai, his answer was that the UK feet were getting wider and hence the UK market needed wide fitting footwear. Mr R Selvam, Executive Director, CLE had a few questions on policy that covered GSP, tariff and Brexit and these were answered by Mr Perkins. To questions on Non-Leather Footwear and sourcing of mesh that made the footwear breathable, light weight, comfortable and low cost, Mr Perkins said that the Indian Components Industry should make them in India and not depend on China every time. Mr Sanjay Leekha, Vice Chairman, CLE summarised the proceedings while Dr N Mohan, Convenor, Non-Leather Footwear and Mr Gopal Gupta, Convenor, Leather Footwear Panel moderated the session.

Reported by: Md Sadiq, CSIR-CLRI

Review by: Design & Fashion Studio

The M.Tech (Footwear Engineering & Management) programme offered by Anna University and CLRI trains the students on digital design and commercialization. If there is a demand from the members of the Industry through Industry Associations, CLRI Design & Fashion Studio can tailor-make such training programmes. CLRI Design and Fashion Studio is geared to offer ‘design intelligence’ for Autumn Winter 20/21, Spring Summer 21 and Autumn Winter 21/22 seasons.