

■ Tekst 7

## Animal rights activists take on India's leather industry

The country that worships cows is accused of disregard for their welfare. **Angus Donald** reports

In the southern Indian state of Kerala, in 1998, an elephant was summoned to court to provide evidence for allegations of mistreatment by its owner. The case was a rare one – not just because of the unusual spectacle of a huge beast appearing in a court of law, but because mistreatment of animals is 28 in India.

Animals occupy a peculiar position in Indian society. While many animals, most notably cows, are considered sacred and their lives are protected by law, their suffering before death seems to be of little account.

29, a campaign by People for the Ethical

Treatment of Animals (Peta), a US-based animal rights organisation, aims to change that by taking on the huge Indian leather export industry, worth just under \$2bn annually.

This week, Peta persuaded Marks and Spencer, the UK retail chain, to stop importing Indian leather. "Marks and Spencer has confirmed it will not purchase Indian skins again until promised improvements in 30 are met," says Peta. M&S thus joins several other British and American retailers which are boycotting Indian leather.

"We disagree with Peta that our treatment of animals is unethical," says Anand Set, an official at the Federation of Indian Export Organisations. "We worship cows in India, we don't mistreat them. I think all the fuss has been started by our competitors in Africa and south Asia who are trying

to spoil our markets."

"The ground reality is very different from the way 31 represents it," says R.K. Pandey, an officer at the Council for Leather Exports. "There may have been some slackness in the procedures but there are laws that have been in place to protect animals since 1951 and they are enforced."

Part of the problem is that India has 32,000 illegal slaughterhouses. Another part is cultural. In a country where 300m people live on less than \$1 a day, concern about the suffering of animals is at best 32 and, to some, faintly ludicrous.

"India can't even guarantee basic human rights, for example the right not to starve to death," said one social scientist. "It will be a long time before luxuries such as animal rights are even considered."

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*Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.*

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- A a new phenomenon
  - B seldom prosecuted
  - C simply not tolerated
- 1p **29** ■
- A Besides
  - B However
  - C In short
- 1p **30** ■
- A animal handling
  - B quality control
  - C trade relations
  - D working conditions
- 1p **31** ■
- A Anand Set
  - B Peta
  - C the Indian government
  - D the state of Kerala
- 1p **32** ■
- A of economic interest
  - B of secondary importance
  - C on consumers' minds
  - D on the political agenda