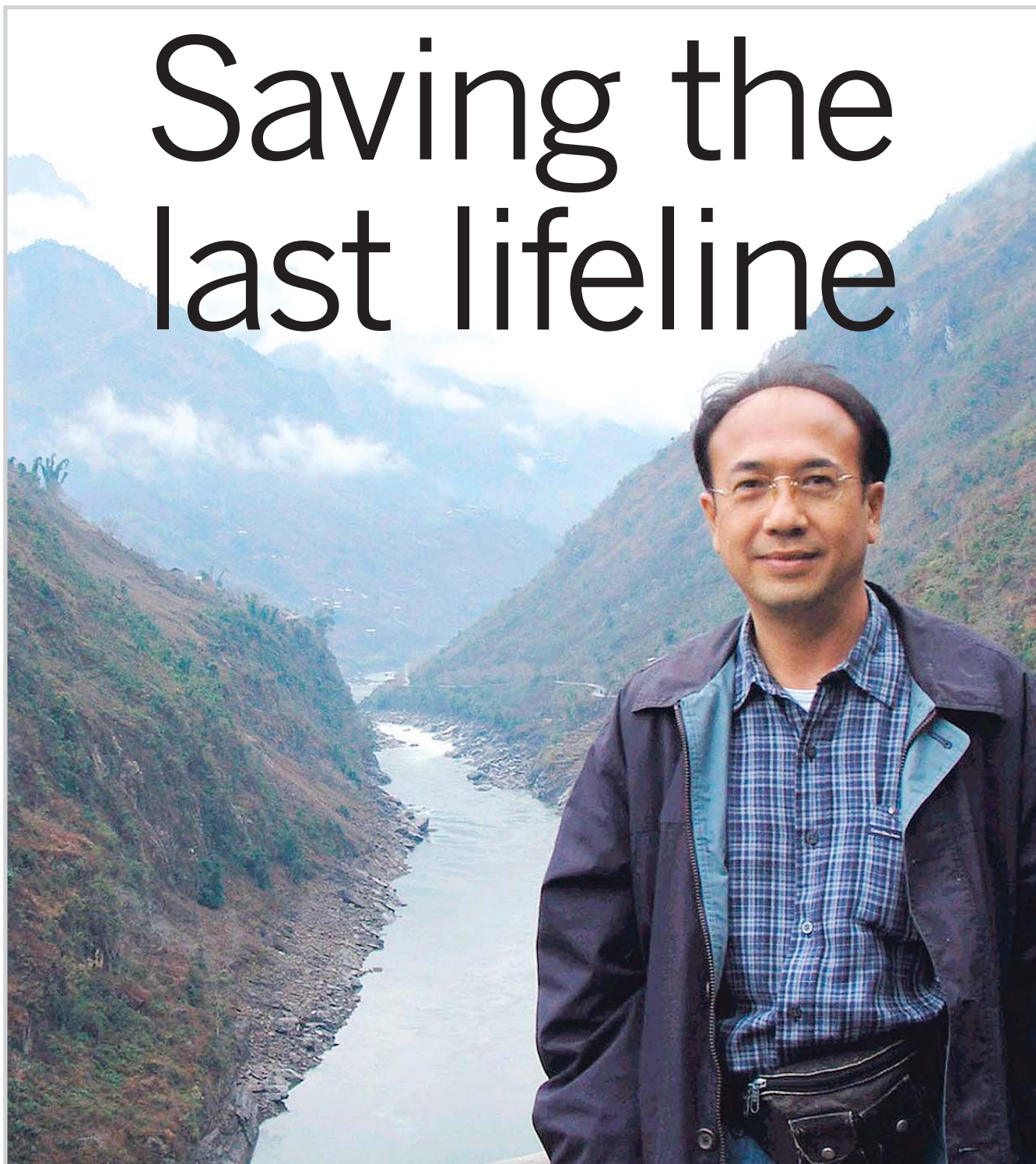


Saving the last lifeline



One man has been the strategist behind many of the struggles to save Thailand's environment, **Pennapa Hongthong** writes

When compared with high-profile environment advocates, Witoon Permpongsacharoen may not be a familiar name, but in the prominent environmental struggles in Thailand, whether it's the 1989 nationwide logging ban or the famous anti-Nam Choan Dam movement, or even the more recent anti-Pak Mool Dam struggle, Witoon has been a key strategist behind these historic campaigns.

Unlike others in environment stardom who come and go, Witoon, now 46, still stands firm in his commit-

ment to protect Thailand's fast-depleting ecology, and the rural communities who depend on it. Instead of campaigning against one destructive project after another, he tackles problems at the policy level, where the projects are born.

While most activists have been stereotyped as working more from the heart than the brain, Witoon's criticism and campaigns have been supported by solid academic research.

Right now, fellow environmentalists as well as energy analysts accept that Witoon is second to none when it comes to expertise in scruti-

nising the country's highly complicated, inefficient and flawed management systems.

Back in the 1980s, the young Witoon was one of the first few people who raised his voice on the need to ban commercial logging following the devastating floods in Katoon, Nakhon Si Thammarat, in November 1988, when mounds of logs came crashing together in a sea of mud to destroy villages in the southern province. Forest destruction and illegal logging were said to be responsible for a devastating mudslide that

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