



life'sacircus

Ted Malanda draws on the wisdom of his royal Wanga ancestors to try and understand a world gone mad

Of Nairobi Show and ageing

Nothing confirms that you are over the hill than when a pretty young woman offers to take you out — to the Nairobi International Agricultural Show — where you haven't been since 1989.

"So what will we do?" I asked stupidly.

"We will see cows, maybe goats," she answered gaily.

It is a measure of how much I have aged that I took up her offer.

The first thing I noticed when I walked in was police officers swarming around. Sadly, they didn't make me feel safe because they seemed primed to respond after the blast, not before. There was nothing alert about them. Their eyes were not sweeping the crowd, looking for suspicious persons or activity. They just seemed to shuffle around, like they were on a break between military parades.

The second thing I noticed — or smelt rather — was fresh paint. Folks, we will never strike greatness. We've had the whole year to prepare for this show, yet it is only in the last week before it began that exhibitors rushed over in a frenetic rush, painting and building things like ants were crawling up their pants. Where the hell were they for 12 months?

The third thing I noticed is that when the show is not in session, we

allow the showground — vast acres of prime land — to remain idle. Will we ever prosper if we keep sitting on resources in such a wasteful manner? What happened to creativity?

The fourth lesson came from the Prison's stand. Sorry folks, but the furniture on offer — perhaps because it was only the first day of the show — had nothing 'international' about it. The wood was excellent, but the workmanship was third rate. I only bought a walking stick and my date, a cooking stick.

POOR WORKMANSHIP

The Prison's Department is Kenya's finest woodworker, but evidently, prisoners are still hacking away with Stone Age tools like hand held planes and saws. What I saw explained why all supermarkets stock Chinese furniture that looks excellent but is crap in actual sense. Why aren't Kenyan carpenters investing in modern tools and designs and striving to make classy furniture with a good finish?

Thereafter, we trooped to the livestock stand. I saw this amazing Ger-

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man dairy breed that outperforms the Holstein, Jersey and Guernsey breeds much beloved by the conservative Kenyan farmer. Clearly, we hate change, even if it is for the better.

No wonder I was horrified to see a three-year-old bull priced at Sh2 million yet pastoralists still mow down an entire village with machine guns to steal 100 *shenzi* cattle worth Sh1 million.

And as for the Ministry of Agri-

culture, shame on you. Why haven't you transferred those model farming methods you keep exhibiting at agricultural shows every year to peasant farmers who produce 80 per cent of Kenya's food using the most *jua kali* of methods?

The ox-drawn plough, the only revolutionary thing about peasant farming, is extinct because we have no oxen and farms sizes have reduced ridiculously. But new technology, alas, remains for show, not farming.