

Careful What You Wish For

By Ohn Khin

Monkey's Paw

Three wishes were granted by the Monkey's Paw in the 1902 Classic story of W W Jacobs. In it, a son had wished for money to settle the parents' mortgage. It materialised as his own compensation money after a gruesome industrial accident. The mother wished for his return and the father who could not entertain the idea of his disfigured son being alive put a stop to it as the third and final wish. The last wish of one of the previous owners of the paw had been his own death.

Long suffering Burmese public is longing for a change. Any change. Does change come with a curse?

The 1997 Asian financial crisis was described as a long overdue event, seen as if by the wolves watching from the cliff top at the caribou grazing in the plains. The fall of the Berlin Wall happened when all requisite changes were ripe and ready, unknowingly.

Forces waiting to change Burma have been there like wolves watching the grazing caribou for a long time. Now the planets have lined up. Yet it is important to remember that the acceptance of the change is dependent entirely upon the willingness of the people of the country Burma. Unlike the caribou, the changes cannot be forced upon them. **It requires at least tacit consent of the people.**

Global economy

This century has seen definitive and decisive shift in global governance from traditional geographical boundaries to governance in between the social layers. This is immensely facilitated by easy global communication and transport without traditional geographical restraint. Relentless promotion of consumer culture in a laissez-faire atmosphere has increased the traditional haves and have-nots separation to a record gap. Current global policy of the Keynesian solution to the global credit problem has simply “kicked the can down the road”. If you lose your bet, put in more money. Unfortunately every time the can is kicked, it gets bigger and messier.

The second European credit crunch is currently fearfully awaited. Eurozone disintegration is on the table. German austerity proposals are vehemently shouted down whereas George Soros's proposal of the use of the European Financial Stability Facility (where the governments will issue unlimited guaranteed bonds to be bought by the rich further indenturing the poor for longer) will simply kick the can a little further along. (<http://seekingalpha.com/article/310152-soros-s-plan-to-fix-europe-is-the-right-solution>) Taxing the super-rich whose assets have multiplied in the last two decades will never happen as they hold the power. The only quick

solution left now is to excite another wave of global consumption in the hitherto “untapped” markets to the benefit of the rich as well as the current poor in the rich countries.

Governments around the world, clueless on how to solve the economic problems, behave like lost evil spirits wondering around searching for something to cling on. Half a billion potential consumers in South East Asia is the current answer as enunciated recently by Obama.

Occupy Movements around the world and the 2011 London riots are direct products of rapidly escalating social and financial disparity where the net benefit of technological advance of the last few decades “empowered” the global companies without fulfilling the very basic needs of the multitude around the world who are worse off than two decades ago. And it is going to get tougher.

With this background, the United States and Europe need the Chinese economy not to founder. Chinese, with their own unemployment and rising inflation, need new “markets”, energy sources and raw materials. The blue print of Pan-Asia transport and communication, energy production, as well as consumer product promotion and the use of cheap labour has already been drawn up long ago by ADB and IMF to stimulate consumption, to facilitate trade and transport and to exploit the resources in land, sea and underground of South East Asia.

Where Burma comes in

Burma, situated in a strategic position, possessing rich resources and an untapped market of 60 million is the last piece of the jigsaw in Asia that everyone is desperate to put in place. The Chinese and Thai pipelines, road, rail and port access, all forms of energy production, factories employing unregulated cheap manual labour and commercial scale mechanised farming will benefit not simply the Chinese but the rest of the world. With integrated Burma, the South East Asian economy as a whole and its commercial relation with India and China will improve multi-fold. There is no material difference between the Chinese interest and the interest of the “West”.

There comes the question: Do people in Burma feel like sacrificing themselves to bail out the rest of the world of their own past and current excesses?

Also realizing that this is only a temporary answer as the fundamentals of potential deep global recession, where suicides in millions and unprecedented violent civil unrest will happen, are still there. Again it will be postponed, not eliminated.

What's in it for the people of Burma?

Say, in the unlikely scenario that Min Aung Hlaing is successful in the currently escalating killing off of all the Kachins using Chinese and Russian (Belarus) guns and helicopters and using Buddhist Sri Lankan strategy of annihilation, there is likely to be less fighting around the country as all other armed groups, none of which are themselves democratic and many of which are not even caring about the people they are supposed to represent, would take various business deals, superficial power sharing and customary lies and false promises from the military government.

As there will definitely be more to go around this time, the involved parties will be more than satisfied. The question of Federal States will be forgotten.

There will be more employment opportunities for the majority of the population with large numbers of the people currently in foreign countries coming back to Burma. There will be easier communication and travel within Burma and Asia as a prime requirement for successful trade.

At what price

To get there, Burmese people will be required to give up all the freedom they currently enjoy however restricted under the military. They would not recognise it, until it is lost.

Where people live and what people eat and what people do will be dictated by multi-national companies according to their ever shifting global strategy and their needs. All rural land will be occupied and turned to smoke belching, soil destroying factories leaving behind graveyards of damage whenever the economic wind changes. One of the most diverse virgin forests left on earth with many inhabitant animal species not even catalogued will be gone in record time. All traditional farm lands will be mechanised. Every single possible mineral including gems and rare earth mineral will be dug up, further destroying the land and at the same time poisoning it. Rich coastal fishing grounds will turn into toxic algae bloom giving full time occupation for Environment Protection NGO's.

Social disruption will be unimaginable. As the minimum wage, which around the world has reduced in real terms, is going to be further cut for the unskilled labour force, people will be having to work two or three jobs of meagre salaries to make ends meet with prevalent marital and family disintegration. Farmers currently walking to their fields carefree will have to take a 10 dollar equivalent ride from urban slums to their factories for the new employment. These newly landless majority Burmese (people living in Burma) forced to seek employment in the factories in urban area will also be exposed to the usual urban ills of social indifference and callousness, crimes-petty and violent, pollution, drug addiction and prostitution.

With much of the social structure gone with change of power in family hierarchy according to the earning, basic culture as well as communal culture will be lost forever. These have been the exact experience in Latin American countries in the last 20 years. <http://www.prb.org/Source/58.1PopulDynamicsLatinAmer.pdf>

And these things will happen with no prior knowledge or understanding by the majority of people who are going to be affected. One has to remember that the current social system has survived in the same slow, happy state for at least a millennium. Recent military interference causing hardship needs be removed. But what in store is not that, it is wholesale destruction of the current social structure.

Current status

Now that the military and so-called opposition as well as currently active players in and out of the country are tightly united as one to rush in with this scheme of prosperity in exchange for permanent destruction of the nature, culture and present status of one of the world's most wonderful societies, the tide seems inevitable. It appears that not just the military but the whole country and exile communities are dead set to finish off the Kachin as quickly as possible so that they can get on with the real business of getting rich quick with fast trains and big buildings, willingly taking all edicts by the multinational companies directly or via WB, ADB and IMF or foreign governments.

If the majority of Burmese are truly desirous of flashy cars and rails in exchange for loss of family structure and social tradition, they should be allowed to destroy their own future. But as things currently stand, they will suffer these in the very near future without even knowing what has hit them.

A parody

There was a story of a native man fishing with a rod. A nearby tourist on a lounge chair advised him to use more rods at the same time and catch more fish by the same effort with the proceeds going into further investment in the fishing, accumulating wealth so that one day he might even have a chance to lounge like himself. At this point the fisherman politely pointed out that the lounging was exactly what he was doing right then.

Different people have different aspirations. For Burma, there now comes a forced upon opportunity for three wishes. Bear in mind that the three wishes in the legend lead to misery.

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