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customer for East bloc goods and services. They were chagrined; Assad favored private enterprise and trade with the West.

A serious conflict of patron-client interests developed in 1976, when Syria plunged into Lebanon's civil war. Suddenly, the army of one Soviet client was at the throat of another—Yassir Arafat's Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). When Assad ignored Moscow's request to get out of Lebanon, Soviet arms deliveries were suspended. Unfazed, Assad merely remarked: "We have a different point of view."

The Lebanese war prompted the Soviets to do some soul searching: Was it prudent to entrust all their weaponry in the region to one stubborn, undependable ally? In November 1978, hoping to exploit Syria's temporary "rapprochement" with Iraq, the Soviets called Syrian military leaders to Moscow. They proposed to base MIG-27s in Iraq, ostensibly to reduce Syrian vulnerability to Israeli attacks. Syria left the talks in a huff.

But later, Ramet observes, with Egypt "effectively neutralized," Iraq "alienated" from Syria, and Lebanon "disintegrating," Assad decided he might need Soviet protection from Israel after all. The two countries signed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in October 1980.

Even so, Damascus repeatedly skirmished with the PLO. In 1983, Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko ordered Assad to patch up his feud with Arafat. Instead, Syrian-supported insurgents soon drove Arafat's forces out of two Palestinian camps. In 1985, an angry Moscow withdrew more than half of its 13,000 military "advisers" in Syria.

The drama continues. Soviet general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev is reportedly "frustrated" by his inability to improve Syrian-Iraqi relations, or to prevent Syria from supporting Iran in its war with Iraq. As Ramet says, the Soviets "have not been able to change Assad's mind" about much of anything. But tolerance is the "the price they must pay" for "stability" in their spheres of influence. And so they have paid it.

Ne Win's Burma

"The Road from Mandalay" by Ian Buruma, in *The New York Review of Books* (Oct. 23, 1986), 250 West 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10107.

Isolated by mountains and the Bay of Bengal, Burma long preserved its unique Buddhist folk culture, despite trade traffic with India and China, British rule (1885-1948), and Japanese conquest (World War II).

But not enough of old Burma survived to suit President Ne Win, who took power in Rangoon in a 1962 military coup. He has led the poor if potentially prosperous land of some 30 million ever since, using the army and the Burma Socialist Program Party. To Buruma, a *Far Eastern Economic Review* editor, the goal of Ne Win's "Burmese Way to Socialism" is clear: no new order, but the "village Burma" that predated Britain's ouster of the Burmese monarchy and efforts to weaken Buddhism's authority.

Burma's 1948 independence was won by educated idealists who sought a Western-style democracy. But in 1947 their leader, Aung San, was assassinated. His successor, U Nu, had a vague vision of a Buddhist welfare state. Under the guise of "building socialism," Ne Win, now aged 74, has

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Not far away from shops selling cheap TV sets and T-shirts, Burma's 600-year-old Great Reclining Buddha sleeps among the crumbling vestiges of colonial Rangoon, a socialist regime's "sublime religious kitsch."

in effect been restoring the monarchy. Burma's kings were ruthless; the last, Thibaw (1858–1916), had his 80 half-brothers and sisters killed. (He skirted the Buddhist injunction against shedding royal blood by having them tied in sacks and trampled to death by white elephants.) Ne Win's "secrecy" and "merciless punishment of the slightest hint of disloyalty," notes Buruma, are royal traits. And he married Thibaw's granddaughter.

Setting out to "Burmanize Burma," Ne Win expelled foreign companies, forced some 200,000 Indian and Pakistani merchants to leave, and put the army in charge of the universities. (Their graduates today work as palm readers, or chauffeur tourists in Burma's ubiquitous Japanese pickup trucks.) Ne Win has not defeated the insurgent armies in the hinterlands that control half the country. But he is succeeding in "strangling" Rangoon, the fishing village that the British turned into Southeast Asia's loveliest capital city. On a visit, Buruma found the city decaying visibly, ringed by slums of "brown huts on stilts in slimy water." The now-dowdy Edwardian office buildings built by the British during the 1920s struck him as "tramps in old dinner jackets several sizes too large." At night, rats roamed the open sewers in search of garbage.

Modernity has not totally disappeared. Many Rangoon residents still speak English and revel in what Buruma calls "Coca Colonization." Some signs: Buddhas draped with disco lights, vintage pop music (Frankie Avalon, Brenda Lee) at wedding receptions, and long lines at the movie the-

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aters, where Chuck Norris action films seem to predominate. But Western dress is rare; most Burmese wear the traditional *longyis*, long skirts that they keep rewrapping "like birds airing their wings."

Ne Win's drive to restore Old Burma, "ruled by a ruler who knows best, but is accountable to no one," continues.

Brazil's New Vision

"Brazil: A President's Story" by José Sarney, in *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1986), 58 East 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Brazil has "a different vision" of itself these days. No longer content to be a "backyard" for "multinationals," Latin America's breadbasket is "a growing international presence"—democratic and "newly competitive."

So writes Brazil's new president, José Sarney, a 56-year-old poet, essayist, and member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters. Addressing American readers in an appeal for U.S. support, he recounts how he became his country's first civilian leader after 20 years of military rule.

In March 1985, then senator Sarney was preparing to end his 29-year career in the National Congress and become vice-president to the popular Tancredo Neves, the man ordained by "History" (in fact, by congress) to redemocratize the country. Sarney knew that his own importance lay in the conservative votes he could deliver for Neves's Brazilian Democratic Movement. As VP—"the political equivalent of the elephant's graveyard"—Sarney expected to "appear at funerals and baptisms."

When Neves became mortally stricken with appendicitis only hours before his inauguration, Sarney found himself, "without wishing it," managing the world's fifth largest country, the largest foreign debt (\$103 billion), slow economic growth, and severe inflation.

Sarney's first act was symbolic: He threw open the curtains at the gloomy presidential palace in Brasilia. Within a year his administration reestablished national and local elections, a free press, and union-employer bargaining. Land and tax reforms designed to help those with incomes below \$600 a year naturally met resistance from the well-to-do. (In Brazil, 10 percent of the population of 130 million controls 51 percent of the wealth.) But last November, in the first open national elections in two decades, the Brazilian Democratic Movement won most of the congressional seats and all but one of the 23 state governorships.

Sarney's economic austerity program, called the Cruzado Plan (after Brazil's new currency, formerly the cruzeiro) has stirred hostility; cattle ranchers, for example, held their livestock off the market to protest the freeze on prices and wages. But inflation, 250 percent in 1985, fell to approximately 50 percent in 1986. Unemployment, 12 percent in 1985, dropped to four percent.

Sarney urges Washington not to broaden restrictions on his country's exports. (Last year, the United States had a \$12.5 billion trade deficit with Brazil.) He also implies that Washington should nudge the World Bank into restructuring Brazil's debt on more favorable terms. Americans, he says, must take a new look at an old friend whose "fidelity" they have long "taken for granted."