

## OTHER NATIONS

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."