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2. Brezhnev's death was far from unexpected. Rumour had frequently anticipated it. Throughout his eighteen years at the apex of the Soviet pyramid there had been stories about ill health. By the late seventies, these were fuelled by visible signs of physical deterioration: the stiff robotic walk, the increasingly slurred speech, the fish-like gasping for breath, an apparent inability in the final period to concentrate on anything but the simplest briefs. It was at the last a rather pathetic figure whose passing was announced at 11 am on 11 November, twenty-six and a half hours after the stated time of death.

3. The last occasion when a General Secretary of the Soviet Party had died in office was in 1953. I was a junior secretary at this embassy at the time and recall the extraordinary manner in which the populace of Moscow reacted to the announcement of Stalin's death. The people, who had been schooled for a generation to adulate the ruthless enigmatic tyrant were stunned. Many wept in the streets. On the day of his funeral vast throngs tried to reach Red Square and, as we learned later, many were trampled to death. When it was first announced that Brezhnev had died, life in Moscow went on as if nothing had happened. He too had been adulated and, in his later years, loaded with medals and prizes, but few reacted with any emotion. His funeral followed a similar pattern; the number of foreign representatives who attended was considerably larger; but there were no violent scenes and the arrangements were by and large quite efficient. Nevertheless, as you, Sir, witnessed on 15 November, the funeral of this unloved, unimaginative and in the final analysis not very successful ruler of the Soviet Union was, in its own way, an extraordinary event.

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