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WASHINGTON TIMES  
13 February 1985

# Chernenko's illness stirs new speculation

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THE WASHINGTON TIMES

President Konstantin Chernenko today marks his first anniversary as leader of the Soviet Union apparently unable to carry on affairs of state as a result of an illness whose magnitude remains a mystery.

For days there had been speculation that the 73-year-old chief of state and Communist Party secretary this week would make his first public appearance since Dec. 27. The occasion was a visit to Moscow by Greece's Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou.

But the meeting with the Greek leader was abruptly canceled and Mr. Papandreou was meeting, instead, with Soviet Premier Nikolai Tikhonov.

"The planned meeting of the premier of Greece with the general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party could not take place due to the illness of Mr. Chernenko," Greek spokesman Dimitrios Maroudas said.

Mr. Chernenko is believed by Western observers in Moscow and elsewhere to be seriously ill.

A highly placed U.S. intelligence official said that Mr. Chernenko "likely has suffered a stroke, in addition to his other problems. The best we can piece it together is that he is in very serious shape."

A Kremlin spokesman told Western journalists in Moscow yesterday that Mr. Chernenko was not in the Soviet capital.

The Soviet president is known to suffer from emphysema, a disease that causes tissue in the lungs to atrophy and results in extreme difficulty breathing. He also is believed to have been sidelined last summer by complications resulting from a coronary condition.

In an unusual development Saturday, an editorial in Pravda, the newspaper of the Communist Party, paid effusive tribute to the memory of Mr. Chernenko's predecessor and political rival, Yuri V. Andropov.

Describing Mr. Andropov as "an outstanding figure" and "an ardent patriot," the editorial suggested that the late leader would have achieved considerably more had he lived longer.

In contrast to the praise heaped upon Mr. Andropov, Mr. Chernenko received only passing reference, a one-line sentence suggesting he is helping preserve the continuity of Mr. Andropov's policies.

Mr. Andropov, who died on Feb. 9, 1984, was head of the KGB, or security police, for 15 years before joining the party Secretariat in May 1982. He succeeded the late Leonid I. Brezhnev as general secretary in November 1982.

Commenting on the conflicting reports on Mr. Chernenko's health, the American intelligence official said, "It most certainly is not a question of 'if' he is sicker than he was, say, in early December, but how badly his health has deteriorated.

"Our information is that he has been moved from the Kremlin to a special clinic outside Moscow, where he is being attended by some of the best medical talent the Soviets can get their hands on."

Asked if that included foreign physicians, the U.S. official declined to elaborate.

Last August, when illness incapacitated the Soviet president for more than a month, it was reported by Western diplomats in Moscow that Swedish specialists were called in to assist Soviet doctors at Mr. Chernenko's bedside.

"Frankly, we were hoping that Chernenko would meet with Papandreou so we could get a better picture of what his health status is," said the American official. Mr. Chernenko last met with a visiting foreign dignitary on Dec. 19, when he held talks with then-Maltese Premier Dom Mintoff.

Tass, the official Soviet news agency,

reported that Mr. Tikhonov has held two rounds of talks with Mr. Papandreou since he arrived in the Soviet capital Monday. It gave no details on what the two officials discussed, or why Mr. Chernenko was absent.

Thursday, Novosti, the state media conglomerate, reported that Mr. Chernenko had addressed a meeting of the ruling Politburo, which meets Thursdays at 6 p.m. in the Kremlin.

Novosti reported that the president is still controlling the affairs of state, but the American intelligence official was skeptical.

"Look, if Chernenko had really appeared at that [Politburo] meeting Tass would have used it as an opportunity to take some photos and spread them throughout the world as proof that everything is normal at the highest levels," he said.

"The fact that [Tass] didn't speak volumes," he said.

Mr. Chernenko, at 73, is the oldest man to assume power in the Soviet Union since the Bolshevik coup d'etat in October 1917.

His year as Soviet leader has been marked by a series of disappearances from public view and failures to participate in events that protocol dictated his presence.

Last July, the government announced that Mr. Chernenko had begun his annual vacation, but rumor spread in Moscow that he had gone into a hospital in the capital's suburbs rather than to his vacation retreat in the Crimea.

In mid-August, Mr. Chernenko did not open the Friendship '84 games in Moscow, the Soviet Union's answer to the boycotted 1984 Summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

Fifty-four days after he had last been seen in public, he made a dramatic televised appearance at a Kremlin ceremony honoring three cosmonauts.

Then, as now, the government refused to comment on his whereabouts.

In late December, Mr. Chernenko again was absent from a formal government function, this time the funeral of Marshal Dmitri F. Ustinov, the minister of defense.

Western observers speculated that the president's emphysema, coupled with the extremely cold weather in Moscow, combined to keep him from the ceremony.

As usual, Mr. Chernenko's place at these events was taken by Mikhail S. Gorbachev, 53, who is widely believed to be next in line for the top leadership position.