World

Brezhnev dead at 75 — Leonid I. Brezhnev, leader of the Soviet Union for 18 years, died Wednesday in Moscow. The Soviet news agency Tass announced the President’s death early yesterday, after the government had foreshadowed its announcement by replacing scheduled television and radio programming with somber music and historical documentaries. Tass announced neither the cause of Brezhnev’s death nor plans for his funeral. U.S. President Ronald W. Reagan sent a letter offering condolences to the Soviet government.

Another Italian government falls — The Italian government resigned from power yesterday, following the breakdown of the ruling coalition between the Socialists and Christian Democrats. The call for elections marks the 42nd fall of an Italian government since World War II.

Shuttle launch perfect — Vance Brand, Robert Overmyer, William Lenoir ‘61, and Joseph Allen enjoyed a perfect liftoff in the space shuttle Columbia yesterday morning. Mission specialists Lenoir and Allen successfully launched Columbia’s first commercial payload—a communications satellite—yesterday afternoon. The two will launch another satellite and make the first American spacewalk in nine years before Columbia lands on a concrete landing strip at Edwards Air Force Base in Southern California Tuesday. The “dry” lakebed previously planned to host the shuttle’s touchdown is under an inch of water from a storm earlier this week.

Reagan meets the press — Appearing last night in his first news conference in six weeks, President Reagan wouldn’t speculate when U.S. Marines participating in the international peacekeeping force in Lebanon might be withdrawn, refusing even to indicate if the troops might be home for Christmas. The President said Vice President George H. W. Bush would lead the U.S. delegation to Soviet President Brezhnev’s funeral: “We must remember,” Reagan said, “that our goal is and will remain a search for peace,” regardless of tension between the superpowers. The President wouldn’t comment on the five cent a gallon gasoline tax increase proposed by Transportation Secretary Drew Lewis, but was careful to characterize it not as a tax, but rather as a “user fee.” Reagan also praised the space shuttle, Vietnam veterans and the American system of government, and alleged “foreign agents [were] sent to help instigate” the nuclear freeze movement in the United States.

Local

Death penalty passes both houses — The Massachusetts Senate passed a bill to reinstate the death penalty early yesterday morning, following similar action by the House one day earlier. The House version calls for execution by lethal injection, while the Senate favors the electric chair. The Senate bill also includes a controversial provision that would prohibit attorneys from asking prospective jurors if they favor capital punishment. Since a unanimous vote of the jury would be required to invoke the death sentence, the restriction could effectively prevent an execution. Supporters of capital punishment will try to hurry the reconciliation process so that the final bill can reach the governor’s desk before January 1. A referendum passed by Massachusetts voters in November removed a constitutional prohibition of capital punishment.

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