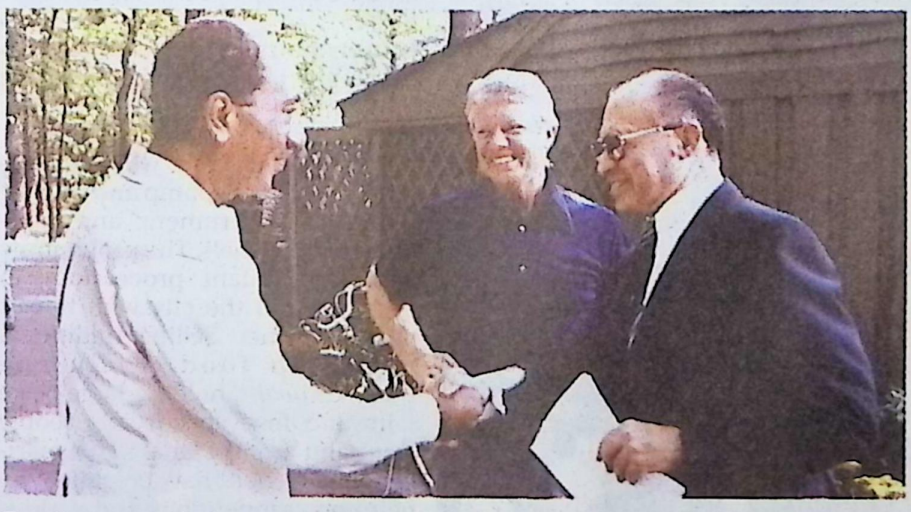
with passion. But think of Joseph Stalin. He smiled a lot; and yet those smiles coolly dispatched his rivals and thousands of others to the grave. He smiled with Roosevelt and Churchill. That smile was again meant to show him in different light, a benign leader of the Soviet Union. But there have indeed been others in the Soviet Union, men like Nikita Khrushchev and Mikhail Gorbachev, who smiled a lot and so convinced the world that even tough communists could be human.

But how do you respond to men who have smiled at communists? In 1962, when the Americans knew what Moscow was up to in Cuba with all its missiles and the Soviets did not know that Washington knew, Andrei Gromyko went visiting President Kennedy in the Oval Office. Not a trace of guilt was there on the countenance of the Soviet foreign minister. It was

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Kennedy who went on smiling, in that ironic manner. A couple of days later, all hell broke loose. Britain's Edward Heath smiled, often mischievously. Asked by a journalist if it was true he had intoned, 'Rejoice, rejoice!' when Margaret Thatcher was dumped by her party, he smiled wickedly and told the bemused newsman, 'Actually, I said it thrice --- rejoice, rejoice, rejoice!' What do you think of that?

These days you feel that Pakistan has a lightweight for a president. Asif Zardari, who could not ever have dreamed he would be head of the state Mohammad Ali Jinnah had cobbled into shape in 1947, keeps smiling at everyone, even at the beautiful American conservative named Sarah Palin. He smiled, took her hand in his and told her he felt like giving her a hug. That certainly did not make the mullahs in Pakistan smile. And do not forget that Pakistan has always had unsmiling leaders in legion. The Nehru-Gandhis did not smile much, but when they did, there was something of grace that came with it. In America, one good reason why Richard Nixon lost to John Kennedy in 1960 was that he came across as dour, sullen and unsmiling during the campaign. By 1968, Nixon had learnt from his mistake. He smiled from ear to ear, from beginning to end, and finally became president after beating the babyish-looking Hubert Humphrey at the election.

Indonesia's Sukarno smiled profusely and married or womanized equally profusely. Egypt's Anwar Sadat is remembered not only for Camp David but also for his smiling demeanour. There was spontaneity in him, of the kind that was there in Jimmy Carter. And rare have been the moments when we have bumped into an unsmiling Bill Clinton, though you cannot say the same about his spouse.

It is quite probable that Cleopatra smiled a good deal, the better to seduce men of the likes of Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. And, of course, you cannot ever forget that all those senators approached Caesar with ingratiating smiles on their faces before plunging the dagger into his entrails. The queens Elizabeth and Victoria did not much smile, but today's Queen Elizabeth does it with grace. As for Diana, Princess of Wales, there was a mix of the coquettish and the shy that defined the way she looked at people and into the cameras. In the early 1970s, Le Duc Tho and Henry Kissinger smiled for the cameras every time they met over the Vietnam War. Those were plastic smiles and did not mean a thing.

In February 1974, Tikka Khan saluted Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Lahore. Bangladesh's founder obviously had not forgotten the moment in March 1971 when Tikka had taken him prisoner. A smile, loaded with meaning, came to him. "Hello, Tikka," he said, shook hands with him and moved on. The Butcher of Bengal was left even more diminished than he had been by a war he and his men had unleashed and then lost in an emerging Bangladesh.

Smiles tell tales, volumes of them. ■