

BEYOND BORDERS, BEYOND SCREENS : A CINEMATIC JOURNEY OF REEL DIPLOMACY



The Indian film delegation's visit to Israel was far more than an industry exchange—it was a deeply layered journey across culture, history, creativity, and conscience. From the moment we arrived, it became evident that this visit had been curated not merely as a professional itinerary, but as a meaningful Cultural Diplomacy Mission aimed at strengthening the multifaceted relationship between India and Israel.

The warmth of Israeli hospitality was unmistakable. Every aspect of the visit—from thoughtfully arranged accommodations to meticulously planned site visits—was handled with care and generosity. Food, often the most immediate expression of culture, became an unexpected medium of connection. Israel's vibrant culinary tradition unfolded before us through an immersive walk across its food streets, led by Mr David, the President of the Culinary Association. Sampling local dishes while listening to the stories behind them was an invitation into Israel's collective memory—rich, diverse, and rooted in tradition yet open to the world.

This delegation visit was organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel in collaboration with the Consulate General of Israel in India. The objective was clear and purposeful: to bring Indian filmmakers, creators, and industry leaders closer to Israel's creative ecosystem, explore filming locations, engage with counterparts, and open new avenues for collaboration in cinema,

animation, television, museums, and immersive storytelling. Equally important was gaining a nuanced understanding of Israel's contemporary realities, its challenges, resilience, and aspirations through direct human engagement.

At the heart of this visit was the belief that cinema is not merely entertainment, but a powerful narrative force, one that can humanize geopolitics, preserve history, and build empathy across borders. Storytelling, after all, remains one of the most enduring diplomatic tools.



Jerusalem Sessions: Creativity Meets Global Dialogue

A major highlight of the delegation was participation in Jerusalem Sessions, a global television and entertainment industry summit hosted at the iconic National Library of Israel. In an era dominated by digital immediacy, the National Library itself stands as a quiet yet powerful symbol of continuity, where history, knowledge, and creativity coexist. The summit brought together entertainment leaders, producers, broadcasters, and creators from across the world to celebrate innovation and collaboration. As part of the Indian delegation, we engaged in conversations around co-productions, animation in short and long formats, television series, web content, and new storytelling technologies. These interactions revealed strong synergies between Indian and Israeli creators, particularly in

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animation, documentary filmmaking, immersive content, and narrative-driven innovation.



Walking Through Time: Jerusalem Old City

No visit to Israel is complete without experiencing Jerusalem's Old City, a place where history does not merely exist, but breathes. Walking through the Jaffa Gate, one feels the modern world slowly dissolve. The air carries the aroma of freshly baked bread and spices, mingling with the murmur of prayers and footsteps that echo across centuries. Within a few hundred meters, faiths converge: Jewish prayers whispered at the Western Wall, Christian reverence inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and Islamic devotion surrounding the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Old City is a living paradox, chaotic yet contemplative, ancient yet alive. Every stone seems to carry a story, every corner a reminder that humanity's deepest beliefs often coexist within fragile proximity. Walking those paths was not sightseeing, it was a meditation on faith, coexistence, and the enduring power of

belief.

Bearing Witness: Nova Festival, Kibbutz Attacks, and Human Resilience

One of the most emotionally profound moments of the visit was our journey to the Nova Festival massacre site and one of the kibbutzim attacked by terrorists. Standing on that ground, where young lives were abruptly taken and homes were burnt, was devastating. Listening to survivor accounts stripped away abstraction and statistics, it was raw human pain.

That night, we met three survivors of the Nova massacre. Their courage, to confront trauma, to heal, and to rebuild with purpose, left an indelible mark on every member of the delegation. Their resilience transformed grief into resolve and reminded us why stories must be told, not to sensationalise suffering, but to honor truth and human strength.



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Memory and Responsibility: Yad Vashem

The visit to Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Memorial Museum, was a moment of deep introspection. Through meticulously curated archival photographs, videos, personal testimonies, and historical documentation, the museum confronts visitors with the scale and brutality of genocide during World War II. It is not a place one simply visits, it is a place one carries forward. The experience shook us to the core and reinforced the responsibility of storytellers to preserve memory, challenge denial, and ensure that history is neither forgotten nor repeated.



Haifa: Remembering India's Shared History

In Haifa, the delegation experienced a moment of

quiet pride and remembrance. Paying homage at the memorial dedicated to Indian soldiers who played a pivotal role in the liberation of Haifa in 1918 was deeply moving. The bravery of the Jodhpur Lancers, Mysore Lancers, and Hyderabad Lancers of the British Indian Army stands as a testament to India's historical contribution far beyond its borders.

This shared chapter of history is a powerful reminder that India and Israel's relationship is not new, it is rooted in sacrifice, courage, and shared values.



The Future of Storytelling: Sapir Film School and Creative Exchanges

Our visit to Sapir Film School and the cultural center's pitch sessions offered a glimpse into Israel's emerging creative talent. Meeting young filmmakers, writers, animators, and creators revealed a vibrant ecosystem driven by originality and purpose. The pitch sessions brought together

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leading Israeli producers, animation studios, influencers, and international delegates, fostering meaningful dialogue and potential collaborations.

The energy was unmistakable, new stories waiting to be told, new partnerships waiting to be formed.



Diplomacy in Conversation

The visit concluded with an informal yet insightful meeting with the Ambassador of India to Israel, Mr. J. P. Singh, and his accomplished team. The discussion touched upon ongoing challenges, long-term cultural cooperation, and the role of creative industries in shaping future diplomacy. It was clear that such exchanges are not symbolic, they are strategic and forward-looking. During the conversation, one of our delegates, Bhuvan Lall, asked the Honourable Ambassador what India could learn from Israel. With thoughtful clarity, he responded in a single word: 'Mindset'.



A Journey Beyond Borders

This delegation visit reaffirmed a simple truth: when art, history, and human stories intersect, diplomacy becomes deeply personal. Such engagements open new doors for India-Israel cooperation, allowing both nations to showcase their cultures with depth, honesty, and empathy.

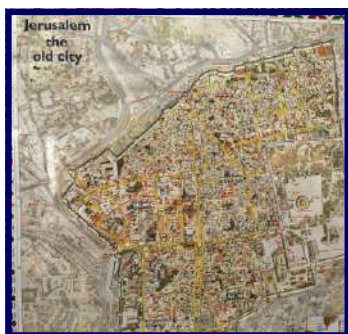
Being part of this delegation as a filmmaker, history researcher, a science technocrat and storyteller, I returned from Israel with a renewed sense of purpose, convinced more than ever that cinema, animation, and immersive storytelling can achieve what policy alone often cannot: build enduring bridges of understanding, preserve collective memory, and kindle hope across cultures.

This was not just a visit, It was a shared journey across time, trauma, creativity, and possibility, pointing towards a future where India and Israel continue to collaborate, not only as partners, but as storytellers of the human experience.

This thoughtfully curated journey would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs team of Israel and the Consulates General of Israel in India, whose meticulous planning ensured that every interaction was meaningful and purposeful. Special appreciation is also due to our tour

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companion Bar Zimilis , whose deep historical knowledge, sensitivity, and storytelling transformed each location into a living narrative rather than a mere stop on an itinerary. Special thanks to Nurit Tinari, Head of the Cultural Diplomacy Bureau, MFA, Israel, Avital Barak from the office of Consulate General of Israel in New Delhi and Rewa Khare from the office of Consulate General of Israel in Mumbai. Reflecting on the visit, one of the delegates and a noted filmmaker Sudipto Sen shared, "As storytellers, we often search for truth through fiction, but here we encountered reality that was far more powerful than any screenplay." Another delegate member, Prof.(Dr.) K G Suresh, Director of the India Habitat Centre says after visiting the Nova site and meeting the survivors of 7th Oct genocide, "While Geopolitics may be complex and different but human sufferings are the same and universal"



The delegation comprised an accomplished group of Indian cinema professionals, including filmmakers Bhuvan Lall, Sanjib Day, Ganesh Shankar Raj, Tejas Sonawane, Rakesh Rana and Suraj Kumar; noted film directors and screenwriters Kumud Chaudhary and Anuradha Tewari; and independent film critic Murtaza Ali Khan, each bringing a distinct creative voice and perspective to this meaningful cultural exchange.

In a nutshell, This was not just a familiarisation tour, it was an emotional education. Israel opened its heart to us. The openness for collaboration, especially in animation and new media, is remarkable. This visit has planted seeds for long-term creative partnerships. Echoing a collective sentiment , "We came as professionals, but we leave as witnesses, carrying stories that deserve to be told with responsibility and empathy."

Together, these voices reflect the shared gratitude, inspiration, and renewed commitment that the delegation carries forward from this extraordinary experience.

**-By
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