

# Kids with special needs make first Red Fort appearance in 70 years

**FESTIVE MOOD** More than 165 children with special needs join I-Day celebrations, applaud by waving hands up in air

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**NEW DELHI:** As the crowd cheered and clapped for Prime Minister Narendra Modi who hoisted the national flag at the Red Fort, there were a special few who expressed their joy differently. They raised their hands up in the air and shook them - the indicator for a clap in sign language.

Khushboo, a 13-year old with hearing impairment, was one of them. Getting up from her chair she gasped looking at the tricolour being unfurled and hugged her friend. She was among the 165 children with special needs who, for the first time in 70 years, had been invited by the Prime Minister to witness the Independence Day celebration at the Red Fort.

"Until now, I used to celebrate Independence Day in my school. My best moment was seeing the flag go up and the military men marching," she told the interpreter who was translating PM's speech and every announcement in sign language for them.

Even if they looked tired from being there since 4am, the energy levels seemed far from sapped. Be it the time when the PM's cavalcade entered the Red Fort premises, him receiving the guard of honour or hundreds of tricoloured balloons being released, the children jumped from their seats and applauded by shaking their hands up in the air.

"My dream of seeing the Red Fort is fulfilled. Once I had come here, but it was shut. It is so beautiful," said Deepak Jain, a child with special needs from the Centre for Autism and Disability at Jagriti Vihar. The other three organizations that brought children to the Red Fort were National Institute of Mental health, the National Institute of Speech and Hearing and Akshay Pratishthan.

According to Lalit Narayan, the nodal officer of the team by the Ministry of Social Justice, bringing these children to the event was planned to the T. "We got the invitation from the PM office on August 1 and around 200 children with special needs were invited," he said.



■ Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets the Bal Krishnas at the lawns of the Red Fort on Tuesday.

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