

THE WEEK

# Medicine called hope

Congress leader **P.R. Dasmunsi** is on the long, hard road to recovery

By Gunjan Sharma

Congress leader Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi has been in hospital for almost a year now. The former Union information and broadcasting minister was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences after he complained of breathlessness and lung congestion on October 12. Just as he was entering the hospital, he fainted and a cardiac arrest followed. He later went into coma and had seizures. He was put on a ventilator. His cardiac condition improved, but oxygen deficiency during the cardiac arrest damaged parts of the brain that control vision, hearing and smell.

On the request of his family, he was transferred to Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, Delhi, on October 20. His condition improved in the next six months and he was off the ventilator. "He is in a post-arrest hypoxic ischaemic encephalopathic state [where the cells of the central nervous system get damaged due to inadequate oxygen supply]. He may recover marginally, but will always need help for his daily activities," says Dr Vinit Suri, senior consultant, neurology, Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals.

Suri explains that during a cardiac arrest, the circulation of blood to all parts of the body, including the brain, is reduced. When a patient is revived, the heart restarts and so does blood circulation. However, if the cardiac arrest lasts for more than three minutes, the brain may suffer irreversible damage because of the lack of supply of oxygenated blood.

Dasmunsi's cerebral cortex (the top part of the brain that plays an important role in consciousness) is partially impaired. His doctor says he is awake: he can see—though his eyeballs do not focus—but can-



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not recognise; he can hear but can't process information. He is being fed through a PEG tube (percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy, where a tube is inserted into the stomach through the abdominal wall). Vital functions like breathing and circulation are, however, normal. He is taken around the hospital corridors on a wheel chair, once a day. "Though he doesn't respond to anything except touch, and also doesn't understand anything, mobility helps improve his

muscle strength," says Suri.

Doctors believe that in this state, the response to touch is more a local, spinal one. "If you prick such a person, his mind doesn't show resistance," says Dr Bipin Walia, senior consultant, neurology, Max Hospital, Delhi.

Dasmunsi has been battling diabetes for 10 years. He suffered his first heart attack on July 8, 2008, on his way to Raiganj, his constituency. Later, he underwent angioplasty, and stents were placed in two coronary arteries.

His family (wife Deepa Dasmunsi represents Raiganj) now shuttles between Kolkata and Delhi, and is hoping for his recovery. "He has never complained of any fever, cough or cold. He is a fighter and was very active in Parliament," says Deepa. "I know he will fight this disease also. And he will recover. I am pretty positive." ■