

'Prove or apologise' — IMA writes to PM Modi on pharma firms bribing doctors with women

In letter to PM, IMA says it's confident there's no evidence to prove bribery allegations against doctors, accuses govt of 'trying to divert attention from real issues'.

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Hospital Beds (for representational purposes) | Source: maxpixels

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New Delhi: The Indian Medical Association, the apex lobby of 3.5 lakh doctors in the country, has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking clarification if the government is planning to take action against pharmaceutical companies that are allegedly bribing doctors and breaching ethical marketing practices.

ThePrint **reported** on 13 January that the Prime Minister has warned top pharmaceutical companies to strictly adhere to marketing ethics, and not bribe doctors with women, foreign trips and gadgets.

The government censure had come at a meeting between the PM and senior officials from top drug-makers, including Zydus Cadila, Torrent Pharmaceuticals and Wockhardt, in New Delhi on 2 January.

In its letter titled 'Deny or Prove or Apologise', the IMA has sought a clarification from the "office of the Prime Minister if such a meeting ever happened".

While the IMA letter is silent on the allegation of doctors taking bribes in the form of foreign trips, expensive smartphones, international conferences, it has demanded "details of the companies involved in supplying women to doctors".

"Moreover, it is imperative on PMO now to release the names of doctors convicted or otherwise as well," the IMA letter read. "The state medical councils should initiate appropriate action if the doctors have been convicted on moral turpitude."

The IMA also said "the government will not be able to prove these allegations".



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Doctors under a cloud

The PM's meeting with top pharmaceutical executives was prompted by the findings of a **report published** by an NGO, Support for Advocacy and Training to Health (SATHI), which suggested that medical representatives (MRs) bribe them with foreign trips, expensive smartphones, international conferences, and even women.

"The PM told drug-makers that their non-compliance with marketing practices is pushing the government to create a strict law. He has warned about bringing in a statutory provision, and indicated that the ministry (of chemicals and fertilisers) has been asked to start working on it," a senior government official who attended the 2 January meeting had told ThePrint.

It was the second such meeting where the government warned drug-makers to stop luring doctors. The first meeting was headed by P.D. Vaghela, Secretary, Department of Pharmaceuticals, on 23 December when the government had warned drug-makers to strictly adhere to rules while marketing medicines and medical devices.

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Govt diverting attention from real issues: IMA

In its letter, the IMA also blamed the government for "diverting the attention from unresolved issues regarding the health of the people and medical education of the country".

"IMA has reasons to believe that such crude tactics is to divert attention of the people from the real issues in the health sector," its letter said.

It described Ayushman Bharat, the Modi government's flagship healthcare, as "a non-starter" that "operates more in government hospitals where treatment is already free".

The letter added: "15 per cent of the money paid to the hospitals including the government hospitals is siphoned off by insurance companies.

"The allotment for the health by the government has hovered around 1 per cent to 1.3 per cent of GDP for the past few years. There is no investment in either infrastructure or human resources."

It also said "violence on doctors has increased" and blamed the government for being unable to provide security or even legislate the promised law for protecting doctors.

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