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## Anthrax Quackery

By Daniel R. Barnett

*There is scarcely a disorder incident to humanity against which our advertising doctors are not possessed with a most infallible antidote. – Oliver Goldsmith, On Quack Doctors*

ANTHRAX! Ever since September 11, 2001, the mere mention of the word causes fear and trembling in many Americans, and with good reason. Primarily an infectious disease of ruminant animals such as sheep and goats, anthrax has been known to infect humans occasionally through avenues such as ingestion of raw meat or exposure to contaminated wool or other animal products. Anthrax is deadly to humans, and the inhalation form of anthrax is especially fatal. As everyone undoubtedly knows by now, anthrax can even be cultivated as a biological warfare agent.

Newspaper headlines have kept running tallies of those killed or kened by anthrax spores contained in mail parcels that have shown up at network television stations, newspaper publishers, Planned Parenthood clinics, and even Capitol Hill. Are terrorists from the Al-Qa'eda network responsible? Or should we blame homegrown white supremacists? Regardless of the source, anyone exposed to these spores must seek medical attention immediately – and that means dodging a growing number of quacks that are trying to promote questionable anthrax remedies.

### Hi-Yo, Colloidal Silver!

Colloidal silver, a solution of submicroscopic particles of silver dissolved in demineralized water, has apparently emerged as a popular alternative remedy for anthrax. While medicines containing silver have been used to treat ailments such as epilepsy and gonorrhea in the past, they're being phased out gradually by newer and more effective medications.<sup>1</sup> Colloidal silver in particular was once used in cold remedies until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; its current role in health care is mostly limited to clinical pathology and laboratory analysis.

For years, however, various health food stores and distributors sold non-prescription, over-the-counter (OTC) colloidal

silver with the claim that this liquid is able to cure or treat various ailments ranging from AIDS to leukemia to typhoid. With a nationwide anthrax scare in effect, the marketers of colloidal silver are apparently finding an expanded market for their product. Some are even selling colloidal silver generators; these are small battery-operated boxes with silver electrodes that are inserted into glasses of water, producing ready-to-drink colloidal silver in minutes. One such generator, the CSG-1Shot, sells for \$7.99 on-line and is sold by Ronald Todd, who served in the US Army as a medic during the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

James South, MA, wrote an article called "Mild Silver Protein and its effect on internal and topical infections" that has been posted on the Web site operated by International Antiaging Systems.<sup>3</sup> He states that silver, both as a liquid solution and as an aerosol, "has been known since 1887 to be extremely toxic to Anthrax spores." Furthermore, South claims "it is widely reported in the medical literature on Silver that various forms of Silver, often at surprisingly low concentrations, routinely kills germs that are known to be antibiotic-resistant." To bolster the latter claim, South provides references to older articles in *Science Digest* and *Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy*.

Unfortunately for the proponents of colloidal silver, modern medical science has yet to corroborate the claims that the substance can treat anthrax or any other infection or disease. A search on MEDLINE failed to produce any references to medical journal articles that demonstrate colloidal silver's effectiveness in curing anyone of any illness. Colloidal silver may be great for the detection of extremely small amounts of electroblotted proteins for high sensitivity peptide mapping, but it appears to be a dud when it comes to neutralizing anthrax spores in humans.

On August 17, 1999, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) declared that all OTC products "containing colloidal silver or silver salts are not recognized as safe and effective and are misbranded."<sup>4</sup> This is partially due to the fact that excessive use of colloidal silver can cause argyria, a permanent bluish-gray discoloration of skin. The ruling effectively outlawed the sale of non-prescription colloidal silver products for drug use, although bottles of the elixir are still being sold in stores and on the Internet minus any health-related claims.

Even with the FDA ruling, however, it is easy to access a Web site dedicated to colloidal silver, get the information you need about dosage and treatment claims, and then buy a bottle of colloidal silver – with no health claims printed on the label – from your local health food store or preferred on-line distributor. Or you can buy a colloidal silver generator that will allow you to create the stuff in the privacy of your own home. And it's all apparently legal.

Greg Bittner, mayor of the central Florida town of Howey-in-the-Hills, has been planning to buy a colloidal silver generator for the town so that the locals can drink the stuff and protect themselves against anthrax.<sup>5</sup> Calling it "the greatest medicinal item that has ever come along," Bittner advised residents to contact Police Chief Curtis Robbins, who regrets being dragged into this: "I can't reach the mayor. He's apparently out of town. He shouldn't have mentioned my name. I'm sure we're going to do battle over this, but I'm sure we'll do it in a professional way."<sup>6</sup>

### **Surfing for Bogus Anthrax Remedies**

It should come as no surprise that other alternative treatments for anthrax are also being peddled on the Internet. If you're looking for a homeopathic remedy for anthrax, you're in luck; Rite Care Pharmacy advertises homeopathic *Anthracinum* on their Web site. Manufactured by Boiron, the 800-pound gorilla of modern homeopathic pharmacopeia, these tiny white pills range are impregnated with homeopathic "potencies" from 6X all the way up to CM for as little as \$4.36 a bottle. You can even get a free US flag pin with each on-line purchase.<sup>7</sup> (By the way, I learned from the James Randi Educational Foundation that BestEarth.com has also been advertising a homeopathic anthrax remedy kit, but information on that kit was unavailable when I visited their Web site.)

Homeopathic remedies are produced by repeatedly diluting and agitating a *mother tincture*; this consists of a mineral, herb, or other substance (in the case of *Anthracinum*, anthrax spores) that has been dissolved in an equal volume of water or alcohol. I'll spare you the details, but if you fill Texas Stadium to the top with water, stand on the roof, release a single drop of mother tincture into the artificial lake, stir it up real good, and then fill a test tube with that mixture, that test tube now contains approximately as much of the original substance as a 6C potency.

Rite Care's Web site, however, states that the "generally prescribed" dose of *Anthracinum* is two daily doses of a single

9C pill, which is more dilute than the 6C version. Homeopathic potencies such as 12C (equal to one drop of mother tincture in the Atlantic Ocean) and 30C (equal to one *molecule* of mother tincture in a container of water 30,000,000,000 times larger than the Earth) are so dilute that absolutely none of the original substance remains, but these are among the most common "strengths" marketed today in American pharmacies and health food stores. I won't even begin to discuss the astronomically high CM potency. Of course, many homeopaths will often state that the amount of *Anthraxinum* present is not important; the "essence" of *Anthraxinum* is still present in those little white pills and will act upon the "vital force" of the person taking them. This bizarre concept, however, has yet to be demonstrated reliably in any clinical trial.

Of course, if homeopathy isn't your cup of tea, aromatherapy awaits you further down the information superhighway. One site operated by The FadaleGroup promotes the use of "essential oils" to fight infection, offering the following commentary:

With more and more research underway, we now know that essential oils are much like the blood of humans, that they are the transporters of the fundamental nutrients, vital elements and chemical constituents necessary to feed and support life in plants. They have the unique ability to penetrate cell walls to transport oxygen, nutrients and many other vital elements directly to the cell nucleus...

We know that essential oils are terminators of disease-causing microorganisms, So deadly, they can kill them by proximity alone (This is due to the oil's volatility). Such notorious characters as staphylococcus, pneumococcus, meningococcus, hemolytic streptococcus, typhus bacillus, diphtheric bacillus, anthrax bacillus, Kock's [*sic*] bacillus, many kinds of mold and a plethora of other pathogenic micro-organisms, are all suseptible [*sic*] to the killing power of specific essential oils.<sup>8</sup>

I love the smell of sandalwood and myrrh as much as anyone else does, but I'm not convinced that these oils can oxygenate my body and cure any sort of bacterial infection I've picked up along the way. Of course, this page doesn't bother to list the oils capable of performing these feats, but a Web site operated by Cambridge Essential Health Center states:

Dr. Jean Valnet, MD, well-know French medical researcher and essential oil expert, points out that the essential oil from thyme literally destroys the anthrax bacillus, the typhoid [*sic*], bacillus, the glanders bacillus, staphylococcus [*sic*], the diphtheria bacillus, staphylococcus, the diphtheria [*sic*] bacillus, meningococcus, and Koch's bacillus, which is the bacteria [*sic*] responsible for tuberculous lesions.<sup>9</sup>

There are some inhalation anthrax patients in America right now who could really benefit from aromatherapy with thyme and other essential oils if these claims were true. But that's a really big if. In the meantime, since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are still advocating the use of antibiotics, I'm going to assume that they know what they're doing.

### **A Word about Anthrax and Antibiotics**

Anthrax spores are useful as bioweapons partially because they're tough little critters – they're resistant to heat, radiation, and even explosives. As one might imagine, they give physicians no end of trouble when it comes to treating anthrax patients. Fortunately, antibiotics such as ciprofloxacin (better known as Cipro) can cure many anthrax cases if the diagnosis is made before symptoms develop. As a result, there has been a huge run on Cipro, with anxious Americans begging their doctors for prescriptions and survivalist quacks encouraging everyone to maintain Cipro stockpiles. Some have even traveled to Mexico, where Cipro can be purchased without a prescription and then brought back to the United States.

When Dr. Tim Gorski discussed medical quackery at the North Texas Skeptics meeting in October, however, he mentioned that even evidence-based medicines could become quack medicines if they're used incorrectly. Using Cipro or any other antibiotic as an unwarranted prophylaxis against anthrax infection qualifies as quackery.

For years, medical experts have been pleading with Americans not to take antibiotics unless they're directed to do so by their physicians. If you haven't been exposed to anthrax spores, there's no need to take antibiotics in the first place. If

you do come in contact with anthrax spores, a doctor can make an objective and reliable determination as to which prophylaxis or treatment regimen is best for you. While Cipro is the drug of choice for many recent anthrax patients, other antibiotics such as penicillin have proven effective in treating anthrax cases. Once again, your doctor can make the best decision.

Why use a relatively lightweight antibiotic against anthrax when you can bring out the big guns? There are two good reasons for this. When a doctor prescribes antibiotics, he or she always admonishes the patient to take every single pill until the treatment regimen is complete. If the patient stops taking antibiotics because the symptoms are beginning to disappear, the organism responsible for the infection may not be completely wiped out at that point; it can recover and re-infect the patient. This time around, however, the invading bacteria may develop a resistance to the antibiotic that would have cured the patient in the first place if he or she had just listened to the doctor. As I stated earlier, anthrax spores are tough critters. Treat a strain of anthrax with the wrong antibiotic or fail to complete the treatment regimen and you may wind up with a form of anthrax that's stronger and deadlier than it was before treatment took place. *Don't take the risk.*

In addition, taking antibiotics is not the same thing as reaching for aspirin if a headache develops. French physician Claude Bernard is credited with making a very profound statement about pharmacology: "Everything is poison; nothing is poison. It is the dose that makes the difference." All antibiotics are capable of producing occasional side effects, but heavyweight antibiotics such as ciprofloxacin, while capable of knocking out nastier infections, are also very toxic to the human system. As an example, Cipro is not recommended for anyone under 18 years of age because of possible joint damage. In fact, a few exceptionally powerful antibiotics such as dactinomycin and doxorubicin are so powerful that they are used in cancer chemotherapy, but their toxicity matches their ability to knock out tumors. Talk to a cancer patient or an oncologist about the various adverse effects of such antibiotics. Above all, keep this in mind: *Antibiotics are not benign medications, and should not be treated as such.*

As skeptics, we urge everyone not to panic. Approach the recent anthrax scare with a rational and measured response. Chances are that you, personally, will not develop cutaneous or inhalation anthrax, but if you do, you should seek out the best evidence-based medical care possible. Avoid unproven "alternative" treatments that have yet to prove their mettle in a clinical environment. Likewise, avoid the temptation to treat yourself for an illness you don't even have yet unless your doctor instructs you otherwise.

Messing around with many forms of September 11 malarkey, such as Kim Clement's prophecies and dubious Bible Code predictions, may cost you nothing more than a little anxiety and a little cash. Messing around with anthrax quackery, on the other hand, could cost you your health – even your life. And we'd sure appreciate it if you could stick around with the rest of us.

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## Sathya Sai Baba the ugly

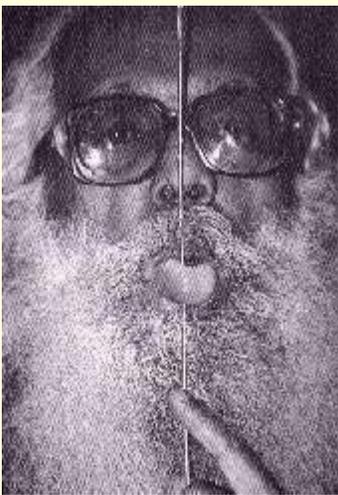
*(Second of two parts)*

**by Prasad Golla**

*This is the continuation and final part of the article on Sathya Sai Baba by Prasad Golla from the October North Texas Skeptic.*

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B. Premanand, magician, former devotee of Baba and today the most important Indian Skeptic — Sai Baba baiter alive, however refused to accept the interference into the investigation and hauled the government to court, accusing the police of having willfully destroyed evidence. Amusingly, in the post, Premanand and K.N. Balagopal, rationalist advocate in the Supreme Court of India, had dragged Satya Sai Baba to court for violation of the Gold Control Act which imposed restrictions on the "manufacture, possession, sale and transfer of gold", since Satya Sai Baba "materialized" gold ornaments to be given to devotees. While rejecting the petition, the High Court Judge Justice Y.V. Anjaneyulu, a member of the Satya Sai inner circle, allowed the argument that an article materialized by spiritual powers cannot be said to have been manufactured, prepared or processed. Perhaps for the first time in jurisprudence spiritual powers were recognized as valid defence in law.



**B. Premanand**  
from <http://www.indian-skeptic.org/html/bp.jpg>

Jed Geyerhahn (JGeyerhahn@aol.com) , a former devotee has this to say in "Sai Baba: Sex and Magic:"<sup>11</sup>

The magazine coordinator T.N. Murthy accused that the police harassment was planned and instigated by

followers of Satya Sai Baba, many of whom occupy the highest political and administrative positions in the country. It is well known that Mr. Ramana Murthy has been publishing in the 11 month-old VIJAYA VIHARAM a series of articles on the so-called God man Satya Sai Baba, titled How did this Charlatan become God? The December issue of VIJAYA VIHARAM carried the 11th in the series of articles on Satya Sai Baba, this present one concentrating on Satya Sai Baba's sexuality, with details from Tal Brook's book Avatar of Night (an account of Satya Sai Baba's alleged pedophilia). It is also a well known fact that Satya Sai Baba counts amongst his close followers the Prime Minister of India A.B. Vajpayee, Minister for Human Resources Murali Manohar Joshi, Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh state Chandra Babu Naidu. The Satya Sai tentacles reach far and wide.

...

Mr. Ramana Murthy will file a petition for anticipatory bail in the State High Court at the earliest during the week of 18 – 22 Dec. 2000. The sections under which he has been charged relate to offences promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, language etc. and to deliberate and maliciously outraging religious belief. The offences if proved are punishable by a maximum sentence of 3 year's imprisonment or fine or both.

Can I ever go back home again after writing this? Though I most certainly do not fear going back, one incident last year comes eerily close to a threat. In the city that I come from (Secunderabad) a humanist and rationalist Editor was arrested on an obscure but religiously sensitive law for partly criticizing Sathya Sai Baba. The incident is described on the Web in a story " Police In India Issue Arrest Warrants To Silence Humanist Editor!"<sup>12</sup>

The International Humanist and Ethical Union has mounted a world-wide campaign against such laws relating to blasphemy or defamation of religion which are used to suppress Freedom of Expression and the Right to Critically Examine Religion. Sathya Sai Baba owes his continued success in part to such laws.

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# What's new

by **Robert Park**

From Robert Park's What's New at <http://www.aps.org>.

## Alternative reading: Two very different books defend science.

When John Diamond, a popular columnist for the London Times, died after a seven-year fight with cancer, he left six chapters of "an uncomplimentary book about complementary medicine." Fortunately, his unfinished book has been published as "Snake Oil" (Vintage, London, 2001). As a very public cancer victim, Diamond had been targeted by the purveyors of alternative medicine with promises of miracles. But to the end, he never lost his sense of humor, nor his confidence in the simple logic of the scientific method. Steven Milloy, publisher of JunkScience.com, has also written a book exposing health scams: "Junk Science Judo" (Cato Institute, Washington, 2001), but Milloy focuses his ire on gross abuses of statistics to support unscientific claims. Many of his targets are familiar to readers of WN: baloney statistics on cell phones, Alar, low-level nuclear waste, power-line EMF, radon etc. I found myself getting uncomfortable, however, when he attacked studies that claim second-hand smoke is a serious health problem, or that

gun locks save children's lives. It was the choice of targets in such a target-rich field that bothered me. We should never tolerate sloppy science, and the evidence in these cases is sloppy to say the least. Still, I could not bring myself to feel sorry for the gun owners, much less the tobacco companies.

### **Evolution again: K-12 education bill is the latest vehicle.**

A Sense-of-the-Senate amendment introduced by Rick Santorum (R-PA) is part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It urges that: "where biological evolution is taught, the curriculum should help students to understand why this subject generates so much continuing controversy, and should prepare the students to be informed participants in public discussion regarding the subject." Evolution is thus portrayed as an open scientific controversy. Framed by intelligent design/anti-evolution guru Phillip Johnson, it's the Kansas thing (WN 13 Aug 99) on a national scale. Worse, it carried 91-8. Those supporting the resolution tended to dismiss it as non-binding, but it will be waved in the air at every school board debate on the issue.

### **More anti-science: Clinton's legacy on alternative medicine.**

The White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy was created by Executive Order in the waning days of the Clinton Administration. Of the 20 commission members, not one is a notable medical researcher or scientist. Their goal, as stated by the Chairman, James Gordon, is "to look at medicine and health care from a different perspective that can lead to a new model of medicine and even a new model of human biology." Gordon sees their report, due out in March, as replacing the Flexner Report in 1910. Written for the Carnegie Foundation, the landmark Flexner Report established medicine as a scientific enterprise, and seemed to doom superstitious healing. Sadly, it didn't.

### **Bio-terrorism: So far, the count is one dead.**

Fortunately, those exposed to anthrax are being diagnosed and treated with the very latest scientific medicine. They are not being treated by homeopathy, acupuncture, touch therapy, magnets, reflexology, crystals, chelation, craniosacral therapy, echinacea, aromatherapy or yohimbe bark. And no one is complaining.

### **Pascal's wager: The Podkletnov gravity shield strikes out.**

In 1992, Russian physicist Eugene Podkletnov claimed that objects above a spinning superconducting disk show a 2 percent loss in weight. Why this should be so wasn't too clear, but it would be great for launching spacecraft, and you could build a perpetual motion machine. There are two possibilities: either this obscure Russian was mistaken, or the First Law of Thermodynamics is wrong. NASA put its money on Podkletnov (WN 15 Aug 97). Four years and \$1M later, NASA thought maybe they saw a weight change of 2 parts per million, but couldn't be sure. "Maybe you need a bigger disk," Podkletnov suggested. That led to another \$1M and another four years. Finally, at a conference on propulsion this year, NASA said that tests on the new shield were "inconclusive." That's NASA-talk for "it didn't work," but if NASA just said, "it didn't work," they would have to explain why they spent all that money on an idea that violates the First Law. In fairness, however, we must point out that NASA also supported Ketterle's beautiful work on BE condensates. Hmmm. Perhaps there's more than one NASA.

### **Alternative medicine: So why not just make it mainstream?**

Any physician entering practice today must deal with patients who use alternative therapies. Would it not make sense, therefore, for medical schools to educate doctors about unconventional therapies that their patients may already use? Georgetown University's (GU) medical school is the first in the nation to announce it will integrate information about such therapies into the curriculum, but scientists are troubled. By definition, these therapies are scientifically unproven; if they are proven, they cease to be alternative. The standard of proof used by proponents, however, is often lax. James Gordon, chair of the White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine, directs the Center for Mind-Body Medicine at GU. Is there a mind-body effect? Sure there is. I doubt if Gordon can increase women's breast size by hypnotism, as he claims in his book, "The New Medicine" (WN 4 Aug 00), but just reading the book made me physically ill.

## **Alternative pregnancy: You better pray this study is wrong**

A study of in-vitro fertilization finds that women who have people praying for them are twice as likely to become pregnant from the procedure as those who don't. It was intercessory prayer, with prospective mothers in Korea, unaware they were prayees, while the prayers were women in the US, Canada and Australia who did not know the women they were praying for. The researchers were at Columbia, and also knew nothing. Science Daily magazine called the results "surprising," but that's much too timid. We can now expect studies on what sort of prayers are most effective and to which god they should be directed, followed by lawsuits against anyone who prays for pregnancies that turn out badly.

## **Levitation: The "science" of Yogic flying**

It's a measure of how seriously the current situation is taken that two years ago Hagelin offered to end the violence in Kosovo with a mere 7,000 Yogic flyers (WN 9 Apr 99). He had come to Washington, DC with his proposal and in the most bizarre press conference in the history of the Press Club, he actually gave a demonstration of Yogic flying. Mattresses were spread right there on the floor, and 12 fit-looking young guys seated themselves in the lotus position. The audience was cautioned to make no sound as they meditated. After a few minutes, one of them suddenly levitated. Well, he didn't exactly float, mind you, just sort of popped up a couple of inches and thumped back down. Then another levitated, and another, till the scene looked like corn popping. There was nothing to suggest they didn't follow parabolic trajectories. My guess is they were suddenly contracting their gluteus maximus. It must be hard work. They were soon panting heavily.

## **Free electricity! Yes folks, Dennis Lee is still at it.**

A full-page ad in Newsweek for Sep 10 announces a 50-state tour to demonstrate a perpetual motion machine and many other amazing inventions. The name "Dennis Lee," which is well known to the Attorneys General of several states, did not appear in the ad, but this is his show. We first saw him in 1997 in Hackensack, NJ. An NBC News camera crew intended to film a demonstration of a perpetual motion machine that ran on ambient heat. An NBC producer asked us to join them, but the machine failed (WN 18 Jul 97). Two years later, ABC News asked us to go to Lee's show in Columbus, Ohio, one stop in a 45-state tour announced in a full page ad in USA Today. This perpetual motion machine relied on "permanent magnet motors" and the "Fourth Law of Motion," but Lee didn't actually demonstrate it. "If you show a perpetual motion machine," he explained, "they will put you in jail" (WN 1 Oct 99). He's done some hard time for his scams, but the failure of government agencies to stop such obvious fraud is discouraging.

## **Dietary supplements: Yes folks, they're still selling ephedra.**

A year ago, WN reported a UCSF Study showing that ephedra, a popular herbal supplement, has serious side effects. The active ingredient is ephedrine, which is closely related to the street drug "ecstasy." Ephedra is sometimes advertized on the net as "herbal ecstasy." The only thing that has happened since is that fatalities are up. Yesterday, the Public Citizen Health Research Group petitioned the Food and Drug Administration to ban dietary supplements containing ephedra. Good plan, except the FDA has tried for years in the courts to ban the stimulant. They are blocked by Congress and the 1994 Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act, passed in response to a huge lobbying campaign by the supplement industry. It exempts "natural" supplements from requirements to test for safety, purity or effectiveness.

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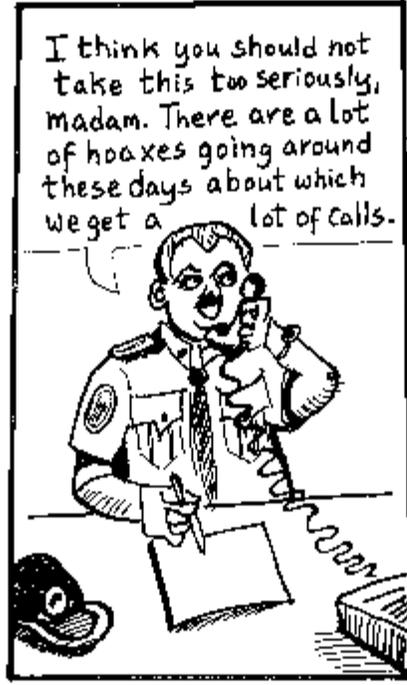
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# **Skeptical Ink**

**By Prasad Golla and John Blanton**

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