

Shazia's week

STEVE ULLATHORNE



I keep being offered cocaine. I must look the type: sexually repressed with large nostrils

I was walking down a street in New York recently when a man shouted out: "Oi Paki, go back to India." That man will be pleased to know that I am going to India for the first time – not to open a call centre or adopt a child, but to do some shows courtesy of the British Council, which has asked me to perform in Pune, Ithaka, Bombay and Mumbai. Apparently the last two are the same place. When did that happen? Why weren't people in Hackney informed of this? My agent's still going to charge them for four gigs.

In preparation, I had to go to the Indian embassy in Aldwych to obtain a visa for my trip. Little did I know that Aldwych had been twinned with Delhi; upon arriving, I found that it was overpopulated, disorganised, and corrupt. I waited for five hours. What I needed was to be fast-tracked. Where's David Blunkett when you need him? He probably wouldn't fancy me, but I might stand a chance with his dog.

When I got to the front of the queue, a man ran out from behind the counter, shouting: "I love your comedy! Come into my office!" He then asked me for £50 in order to get the job done quicker. The place was full of bribes and backhanders, rather like the House of Commons, except in India you don't get a peerage.

I applied for a new passport. They returned my application saying that they couldn't accept the photo because too much of my face

was covered. I was outraged by this blatant prejudice. I really need to get my top lip waxed.

In preparation for the trip, I've had to do lots of interviews over the phone to promote the shows. The phone lines have been terrible, and the service appalling. I had a call from my bank, Lloyds TSB in north London, via Delhi, and spoke to a lovely lady called Shobna who said she would call me back the next day. The next day, a woman called Sangeeta rang.

Then she said: "I don't know if it's my washing powder or if I've got worms"

I asked what had happened to Shobna. She said: "Unfortunately, Shobna is off today – with rickets." You don't get that problem with the staff in Notting Hill.

I don't know why, but I keep getting offered cocaine. I must look the type: a sexually repressed woman with large nostrils who hangs around toilets. I was performing at a club last week and went to the toilet just before going on stage. There was a knock at the door and when I opened it a woman I'd never seen before said: "Would you like a line of coke?" I've heard of strangers offering sweets to kids, but strange women knocking on toilet doors

offering comedians cocaine?

I said: "No thanks, but you go ahead, I'll just watch." She said: "Have you got a ten pound note?" I said: "Do I have to pay to watch?" She said: "No, I need it for the cocaine." I said: "I've got a five and five ones – will that do?" She asked if I had a credit card. I thought, bloody hell, this is an expensive business. I said: "I have, but I don't think it's going to go through." She said: "No, I need it to chop up the coke." What do you do if you've got bad credit? Use your Nectar card?

After 20 minutes, she was sniffing like a dog. I used to be really naive and offer people Andrex and Locketts at parties. She told me she had split up with her boyfriend three months ago and she was still upset about it, and that her Auntie Dawn had recurring eczema.

Then she said: "I don't know if it's my washing powder or I've got worms." I'd only met this woman half an hour earlier! What happened to shame? I grew up with it; where does it exist in our society now? I'll tell you where – in a small circle round Renée Zellweger's armpit on page three of *Heat* magazine. Oh my God, she's got a millimetre of body hair. Let's circle it! The shame! You should see the Islamabad version of *Heat*; it is the hula hoop of shame. There are big fat hairy women in cages. Rather like the House of Commons. ●

Shazia Mirza

PAYNE'S GREY BY CHRIS PRIESTLEY

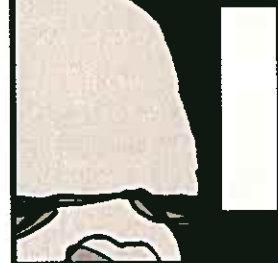
Lytchett Matravers felt ashamed to be British. He felt ashamed to be white.



He felt ashamed to be male, middle-class, middle-aged, educated, employed.



He felt ashamed to be human.



But he wasn't going to let it spoil his birthday.

