

# The Canberra Times

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## Get me into there: comic faces up to celebrity jungle challenge

By Ebony Bowden  
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*Nazeem Hussain knows he has been cast as the token person of colour on I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here! and he's OK with it.*

The 31-year-old comedian actually thinks it's a good thing, although he had to be certain Channel Ten producers had his best interests at heart before he signed on the dotted line.

"I know that my race definitely plays a part in it and I think that's actually a good thing," Hussain told Fairfax Media in South Africa days before entering the series. "Producers didn't want to create conflict that's sensationalist and they didn't want to reduce me to a stereotype."

Race has always been at the centre of Hussain's work, challenging prickly topics such as Muslim identity with humour in acclaimed SBS series *Legally Brown*, which was nominated for a Logie in 2015.

Of course, there's more to the funnyman than his faith, but Melbourne-born Hussain says he has spent most of his life educating others about his community.

"My life perspective on the world is so much broader than just race but at the same time, when you're a brown Muslim living in Australia right now, race defines you in so many ways.

"Race and religion are so central to my identity, and to the identity of people that aren't white and straight in Australia, so it's definitely a big part of who I am, but beyond that, there are other things that people may learn about me [on the show]."

At the height of the Gulf War, when Hussain was six years old, *A Current Affair* host Jana Wendt arrived at their house unannounced to interview his Sri Lankan father, Shereen Hussain, because he shared a name in the phone book with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussain. Shereen left for Sri Lanka six months later and never returned.

With right-leaning personalities such as Steve Price, Tziporah Malkah and Lisa Curry on the show, the producers have clearly cast the series with politics in mind. But Hussain says he's on the show to challenge himself and meet people from across the political divide.

"Ultimately, I think people just want to be understood. People won't necessarily agree with me. I'm not in the jungle and I don't do things to have people jump to my

side of the fence, I just want people to take me for me and similarly, I want to understand other people from other backgrounds and beliefs.

"I think so many of the problems in Australia could be overcome if we actually shut up for a second and listened. We speak so much about people that we should actually be hearing from - whether that be women or gay people, Aboriginals or Muslims, Muslim women wearing burqas and niqabs, asylum seekers, refugees - if we just shut up for a second and gave the microphone to those people, we'd be in a different place."

Hussain begins touring for the Melbourne Comedy Festival in March and no doubt will draw on his I'm a Celebrity experience for fresh material.

"No one goes out of their way to challenge their own views and hang out with people who are older than them and are from across the political spectrum and just sit and be challenged. That's not what happens in normal life.

"In the jungle I feel like this is an opportunity for us, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to challenge ourselves intellectually."

*\*This journalist travelled to South Africa as a guest of Channel Ten.*