

# Open Forum 3

## Web Site Transcript

### Chapter 6

**A = international student association chair**

**B = Jay Carver**

A: Hello everyone. I'm the chair of the International Student Association, and I'm delighted to introduce our speaker today. Every month, we invite a student who has traveled to an exotic place to come and tell us about it. Today, we welcome Jay Carver. Jay is a sophomore and last winter break, you went to the wettest place on earth, is that right?

B: Yes, it is. Thanks for asking me to come and bore you with my vacation photographs! Last winter, I was in India. I volunteered for a charity in the capital, Delhi, and then I traveled around the subcontinent. India is a country of amazing contrasts—there is extreme poverty, and fabulous new wealth. There are ancient temples, and modern automobiles. India's economy is one of the fastest growing in the world, but many Indians live in poverty. This is also one of the most populous countries in the world, with over 1 billion people. Anyway, the region I want to talk to you about is in northeastern India. The state of Meghalaya (that's M-E-G-H-A-L-A-Y-A) is a mountainous state that's also near the ocean—the Indian Ocean, of course. It's in the corner of the country, close to the border with Bangladesh. It's a truly beautiful region, full of waterfalls, caves, lakes, and rare plants and flowers. I hiked and swam and even attended a traditional religious festival.

A: What's the climate like? It must be wet if there are so many lakes and waterfalls.

B: Yes, that's why the area is famous. It's the wettest place on earth. Exactly which town holds this honor depends on who you ask. The best known town is called Cherrapunjee. It receives an average of 11 meters of rain a year. That's about eight times as much rain as falls on New York City in a year, and 24 times the amount in Los Angeles.

A: So, is that because of the monsoon?

B: Yes, the monsoon is actually the name of the wind that blows off the Indian Ocean. The air gathers water as it climbs the mountains towards Meghalaya. Cherrapunjee is over a mile above sea level. During the height of the monsoon season, it rains every day.

A: Were you there in the monsoon season?

B: No, that's not a very good idea. The heaviest rains are from April to September. I was there during the dry season. It's strange, but the wettest place on earth doesn't really have that much water. For a start, the dry season really is very dry, but the main reason is human interference. The area used to be covered with forests, and the roots of the trees held the soil together allowing rain water to move through the soil into underground wells. However, the trees have been cut down, and the topsoil has washed away. So, there's nothing to stop the rain water from running off down the mountainside. Coal and limestone have also been mined, which further damaged the land, and crops were grown in ways that failed to protect the topsoil.

A: So, how do people get water?

B: It's not easy. There are pipes and tanks, but they are old and, well since it rains so much, they've rusted. There's no money to fix them, so the water just leaks out of them. The villagers collect water in buckets and cans during the rainy season. In the dry season, they have to walk to streams in the mountains above the town to get water. And in a terrible irony, they sometimes have to buy water from commercial trucks. Yes, the people who live in the wettest place on earth have to buy their own water.

A: Didn't you say that there are other places that also claim to be the wettest place on earth?

B: Yes, it's quite a funny story, actually. The neighboring town of Mawsynram has been fighting a battle with Cherrapunjee for the title. The local newspapers are full of this story, and it seems that the argument over the title is getting worse. Mawsynram is a much smaller village, and the official weather man in Cherrapunjee claims that the data from Mawsynram are not reliable. The man who records the rainfall in Mawsynram only does the job part time, and the officials in Cherrapunjee don't trust his figures. Apparently, it's quite a difficult task to calculate the average rainfall in these places, and only Cherrapunjee has the expert meteorologist to do it. Also, the exact rainfall obviously varies from year to year, but on average, most people agree that Cherrapunjee is indeed the wettest place on earth, even if you can't always find any water to drink.