

INCE our childhood we are told the story of the famous Niagara Falls. We also come across this falls in geography books. Alike many others, I have been dreaming to visit this falls ever since I came to know about it. My dream came to reality when we undertook a family trip to the US in July-August 1998. In my another travel story published in *The Daily Star* in its issue of 20 November 1998, I stated the background of our US visit.

The City of Niagara Falls is divided between the USA and Canada by the Niagara River. They are called City of Niagara Falls New York and City of Niagara Falls Ontario. The American part of the Niagara Falls is located in the City of Niagara Falls under New York State of the US. The Canadian part is located in the City of Niagara Falls under Ontario Province. Main tourist attractions in the City of Niagara Falls include: Maid of the Mist; Cave of the Winds; The Aquarium of Niagara Falls - a place of immense interest to children, biologists and zoologists; Castellani Art Museum; Goat Island; Three Sister Islands; Niagara Power Project Visitor Center; Niagara Reservation State Park; Niagara's Wax Museum of History; Schoellkopf Geological Museum; The Turtle; Native American Center for the Living Arts; Viewmobile; Whirlpool, world's largest, 250 feet deep and Whirlpool State Park; the Winngarden; Fort Niagara; Jet-boat; Floral Clock; Gorge Adventure; Artpark; Helicopter Rides; Butterfly Exhibit; Skylon

Tower; Botanical Gardens; Minolta Tower; and Wedding Chapel.

We went to visit the Niagara Falls from the city of New York. It is about 450 miles from the New York city. One can go there either by train or by car. We went by hiring a car. Going by car as we all know, renders some flexibility to visit other places en route. A return train ticket per person costs around \$100. For the group, it may be cheaper if car or microbus could be hired. A car or a van (microbus) could be hired at around \$300 for 48-72 hours. The highway between the city of New York and the City of Niagara Falls is also good and simple. It takes around 8-9 hours to reach the City of Niagara Falls from the City New York by road.

Renting a car for long journeys needs two tourmakers to have authorised driving license in the US. I carried along my international driving license issued by the Swiss Authority. My brother-in-law, who accompanied us during this journey from the city of New York had an American Driving License. In fact he is a US national and lives in the city. Initially I used my driving license just to hire the car. I did not have any intention to drive. I, however, did drive during our going to the City of Niagara Falls and journey back, though I never enjoyed driving. I had many long discussions with my friends in Foreign Office who, according to their version, enjoy driving. My view always differed from theirs on this issue.

I consider driving necessary

Far from Home at Niagara Falls

by Dr. Khalilur Rahman

Originally, 202,000 cubic feet per second of water flowed over Niagara Falls. However, half of this water is now being diverted for power generation by the US and Canada. Today, Niagara Falls is the largest producer of hydro electricity in the free world. Fifty per cent and 75 per cent of the total flow of the Falls is regulated during day and night time respectively for mainly two purposes — for generation of electricity and to prevent erosion at and around falls sides. This is a unique example of joint cooperation on water management between the USA and Canada.

for a person to ensure his or her daily routine work. I have to drive to take my daughter to school, bring her back home, go to doctors and hospitals for treatment, go for shopping (though I do not like to), go to invitation and for so many such necessary and urgent works that I can do without. I always argued that if I had the financial capability to recruit a driver abroad, I would have never driven.

To me the reason is very simple. Driving put extra pressure on mind. I have always to be careful to avoid accident. My driving motto is also very simple — "I would not hit any vehicle, any persons or objects". If I can ensure this, I can avoid, in my opinion, a good percentage, perhaps 50 per cent of possible accidents while I drive. The another reason that I do not like driving for, is that while driving I cannot enjoy, rather miss the roadside beauty — architectural beauty of buildings, natural beauty, so on and so forth. I am, however, very happy that I have a car. I never dream for a house. I always dreamt for a car. The Almighty has given me the capability to maintain a

car. One of my closest friends in our Foreign Office, Shahidul Islam used to say "my forefathers never thought of it, I have got it". I share his observation. I express my fullest satisfaction at what I have. Thanks to God.

The Falls

Mainly there are three falls that consist the Niagara Falls. One is on the Canadian side called Horseshoe-shaped Falls, because of its shape. It is 172 meters high. Its brink measures 2,500 feet. More than 90 per cent of the water of the Niagara Falls flows over this falls. This massive volume of water over this falls is responsible for the colour of the water. From a place called Terrapin Point, one can get a spectacular view of the Horseshoe Falls. One can see this falls from the viewing platform at the top of the Canadian end of the waterfall. However, it is also possible to see the waterfall from near its base and, for that matter, from behind. There is actually a lift which takes people down to tunnels which run behind the falls, giving a staggering view of the tons of water crashing over the edge every second. The force

of the impact of the water on the rock actually makes the tunnel walls vibrate. One can also see the view from outside. In this case it is not possible to prevent from getting wet, though rain jacket is supplied. It is rather worth to dare the spray to feel. Two falls, one is smaller than the other, are on the US side. Their height is 180 feet and brink is 1100 feet long. Less than 10 per cent of the water flows over these two falls.

The smaller of the two American falls, the Bridal Veil Falls forms the "Cave of the Winds". The length of the cave is 75 feet.

The "Cave of the Winds" tour takes summer tourists on a boardwalk around the rocks at the very base of this falls. It is amazing to go up to the extent possible the falls through a wooden-made stair case. Though everybody is provided a water-proof yellow colour nylon jacket and special shoes, there is no way to avoid get wet by force and velocity of falling water. It is a real fun and terrible experience to stand below the falls and get wet. One can really feel what falls do mean.

Riding in one of the Maid of the Mist boats provides for an

Prime Ministers have taken the Maid of the Mist cruise of Niagara Falls. It is one of the oldest tourist attractions in North America. The tourists are taken on board the cruise, as close as possible below the falls. A sort of polythene blue rain jacket is provided to protect the tourmakers from getting wet. But there is no way to get rid of the strong and high speed water

stays overnight at the Niagara Falls city to see the beauty of the falls at night. A double room costs less than 100 US dollars there. Like the whole America, food is also cheap there. Sun set renders a fascinating view of the falls. The falls at night is illuminated by powerful lights that change colour periodically. The night illumination of the Niagara Falls is one of its most beautiful and fascinating aspects. Best vantage points for viewing the falls at night is the Terrapin Point on the Goat Island in New York or the Near Table Rock in Ontario. There are also arrangement for "Fireworks" over the Falls every Friday night during the Summer. It starts at 10:00 PM. One should not forget to carry camera along.

Falls Site — A Place of Love

In the view of many, the rushing and foaming water at the falls can remind Freudian significance. That is how the falls site could be a favourite destination for honeymooners. By all virtue, it is a romantic place. The falls have also become a place of testing the depth of love among the young generation. They have also become a place of ending frustrations of failed lovers. According to available information, during summer time, on an average two suicides are reported every week in the falls. These mainly occur on the American side and most of the suicides are reportedly young people. Cooperation on Water Management

The water that flows over

now being diverted for power generation by the US and Canada. Today, Niagara Falls is the largest producer of hydro electricity in the free world. Fifty per cent and 75 per cent of the total flow of the Falls is regulated during day and night time respectively for mainly two purposes — for generation of electricity and to prevent erosion at and around falls sides. This is a unique example of joint cooperation on water management between the USA and Canada. On both sides of the Niagara river, there are four conservators/reservoirs — two on the USA side and two on the Canadian side, water from which are being used for production of hydro-electricity. One third requirement of the total electricity demand of the State of New York is met by the hydro-electricity of the Niagara Falls. On the other side, almost total electricity demand of the Ontario Province of Canada is met by the hydro-electricity project of the Niagara Falls.

In our region too, we have enough water resources. For their maximum utilisation for development purpose of the countries of the region, we do need regional cooperation. This cooperation may be forged under sub-regional growth quadrangle. A Sub-Regional Water Management Board may be set up under this sub-regional grouping. As the Coordinating country of this Quadrangle on Natural Resources and Energy, Government of Bangladesh may wish to raise this issue in the appropriate forum under the Quadrangle. A joint water management approach may also alleviate our flooding problem that causes enormous damages to our resources and hinders the space of our economic development.

The spectacular beauty of the Niagara Falls is an incredible experience that one can never forget. Its wild beauty can be discussed perhaps only with some one who has had the unique experience to feel the awesome vitality of the Niagara River as it plunges over the falls, the rising mist and delicate rainbows created amidst nature's turmoil. Visiting Niagara Falls could thus be a very exciting and most enjoyable trip for the tourmakers from our country. After facing so much of hassles in getting US or Canadian visa, there is every reason to visit this falls.

Moreover, one can easily go to beaches, hills, places like Disneylands and others. These types of tourist attractions are now available almost in every country and could be visited with relatively ease. But the Niagara Falls is the one that has to go to the City of Niagara Falls to visit and once some one is out to the US or Canada for visit, must try to go there.

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EXAMINING ENGLISH Are there Alternatives?

by Bob Ellison

Most of the attention devoted to the issue of public examinations in the last six months has focused on security. 'Leakage' of papers and wholesale copying in examination halls has become a worrying national problem indicating that the scramble for a pass has taken a serious turn for the worse.

What this means is that the results of examinations such as SSC are thrown into doubt as the genuineness of performance comes under the spotlight. We ask ourselves about the reliability of results. If we took a particular candidate and asked him/her to take the same examination again would we get a similar result? If we do not get a result close to the original one, then the measure being used is untrustworthy.

There have been many suggestions how to overcome this problem ranging from expelling cheats from the examination room — an apparently dangerous course of action — to transferring the responsibility for examinations to district education boards, which will work independently of one another; how the latter proposal will solve the problem is not clear.

In the midst of all this discussion, it seems that an equally important issue is being ignored and that is what are the purposes of these examinations. Are they simply about ranking students as first, second, third etc. without any reference to what these students actually do with the language?

If you look at current examination papers for English at SSC level, you will see their emphasis on regurgitating facts of a literary and linguistic nature which have been committed to memory by students. And even where there is an attempt to examine language, it usually revolves around an esoteric knowledge of grammar which bears little relationship to the real world of communication.

As a result, unfortunately many students cannot utter anything comprehensible, or write coherently in a language they have apparently learned for the previous six or seven years.

What Can be Done?

It has become almost a cliché to say that what society needs as the next millennium approaches is an increase in its skills. In English language, there is a great need for an improvement in our ability to communicate particularly orally and in writing as the world becomes one marketplace.

Evidence from examination papers in Bangladesh suggests

that as far as English is concerned students are learning very few, if any, appropriate skills.

There is an alternative to the present approach, of course, but it is not a simple one to introduce for a number of reasons.

In the first place, it will require a leap into the unknown; a place where the teaching of language emphasises real communication.

Secondly, teachers will have to improve their skills in order to deliver the new curriculum. Finally, in order to get the support of industry and commerce, it will be necessary to assure employers that this new examination will measure useful English language skills and that the results will be trusted.

The question of examination security is of primary importance as there is no guarantee that new examinations in English will be any more successful than the present ones.

There is a need to seek solutions to some of the problems associated with examination leaks and cheating. For example, the printing of papers might be moved outside the country.

Candidates seen to be cheating

would have their examination numbers noted by two independent invigilators and then be subsequently informed that their papers would not be accepted.

In the latter case, this would at least avoid face-to-face confrontations in the examination hall.

However, with an emphasis on skills rather than, for example, memorisation, there will at least be a fundamental change which will move the teaching of English into line with what is happening in many, economically successful parts of the world.

Test Example

An example of a skills-based examination follows. It is not suggested that the example is appropriate to SSC level at this stage. However, in the future, it is hoped that such a test, adjusted in cultural content, would not be too difficult for students at this level.

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This is a common format in many countries allowing the testing of a wide range of reading skills: e.g. scanning for specific information, extracting important details and inferring meaning. The answers have to be sought rather than are provided as with multiple choice questions. Therefore, the 'guess' factor is reduced. It is a real task in that one can imagine a situation where one might be given a leaflet of this type from which information has to be obtained. In addition, although

there is a need to read the leaflet carefully, there is no need to memorise the facts.

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