



SIGHTINGS

## THE COST OF ECONOMIC SUCCESS

**IT'S NOT WHAT THE BOY PICTURED ABOVE IS DOING THAT'S SO TROUBLESOME. IT'S MORE WHAT HE'S NOT DOING.** He's not in school learning geometry, or science, or English, or anything else beyond how to work hard for daily survival. Inspecting a giant utensil at a manufacturing plant in Kolkata, India, he is the result of what happens when a country pushes for ever-greater economic growth at the expense of educating its youth.

About 4 percent of Indian children never start classes, 57 percent don't complete their primary education, and almost 90 percent never finish secondary school. Can you blame them? With so much of the country living in poverty, you can perhaps sympathize with the pressure endured by families and kids to earn greater income just to survive. Many critics do, however, blame the government for not paying enough attention to schooling India's 350 million children under the age of 15—that's 30 percent of the country. Research shows that 84 percent of Indians who finish school lack sufficient cognitive abilities to thrive in the workplace—and we're not talking high-school students but *college* graduates here.

The country's economic successes of the last decade—including high-profile IT firms, Wall Street CEOs, and top strategy consultants—have distracted many from its failure to look ahead. So perhaps it's a good sign that India's economy is slowing. Indeed, in recent times, the government has focused more on raising teacher salaries, ensuring more schools have electricity and toilets, and ameliorating the corruption that steals funding from countless local schools. Still, it's going to take more than a few lightbulbs to address problems that demand greater, and more equitable, allocation of resources. There's a big gap between India understanding it must educate its future labor force and its taking steps to make sure that happens. — VADIM LIBERMAN