



SIGHTINGS

THE DARK SIDE OF GROWTH

WHAT WOULD A PLANET WITH NO ELECTRICITY LOOK LIKE? NBC's drama *Revolution* answers this question. With no power, a sense of powerlessness grips society—you know, like how you feel when your cell-phone battery dies. Sort of. You can imagine this world—and feel grateful that you don't live in it—by tuning in on Monday nights, but millions of people are trapped in it for real.

Last July, India endured history's most expansive blackout, affecting some 670 million people—about 10 percent of the world's population. As the Indian economy swells, power outages remain commonplace—and increasingly embarrassing—in a nation that prides itself as a growing economic force. Each blackout shines a light on what happens when a country's economy expands beyond what its infrastructure can support. When the power grid goes dark, so do businesses, leaving laborers little to do but nap, like the employee pictured above outside a yarn-spinning-equipment factory in the southern Indian city of Coimbatore after a blackout in January.

Meanwhile, a government notorious for burdensome bureaucracy struggles to figure out how to keep the lights on. Numerous studies paint a shadowy future, with some suggesting that India remains decades away from meeting its energy needs. Problems plague nearly every part of the supply chain, including the national transmission system, which a McKinsey study estimates needs \$110 billion to fix. Critics also point to bankrupt local distributors, crippled by what some argue are onerous and outdated government policies that, for instance, supply farmers with free electricity.

Ultimately, a problem this complex will demand that officials from both public and private sectors stay up many nights working together. That is, if the lights don't go out.

—VADIM LIBERMAN