

Blackout hits 300 million in northern India

July 30 2012, by Ammu Kannampilly



File photo of high voltage electricity towers on the outskirts of New Delhi. A massive power cut blacked out a vast swathe of northern India Monday, leaving an estimated 300 million people without power in the worst outage in more than a decade, officials said.

A massive power cut blacked out northern India Monday, leaving more than 300 million people without power, shutting down water plants and stranding hundreds of trains in the worst outage in a decade.

Power Minister Sushilkumar Shinde said the entire northern grid collapsed for six hours shortly after 2:00 am (2030 GMT Sunday), causing chaos in nine states including the capital New Delhi.

The cut severely disrupted transport networks as around 300 passenger trains ground to a halt, requiring the deployment of diesel engines to pull them to safety, railways officials said.

In New Delhi, metro services started up an hour late and were operating at only 25 percent capacity for most of the morning, while traffic lights also went down causing snarls and lengthy tailbacks in the early rush hour.

Major hospitals and airports in the region were able to function normally on emergency back-up power, officials said.

"As soon as there was a disruption, all our essential services like flight arrivals and departures, and check-in were shifted to our back-up system," a spokesman at New Delhi's international airport said.

The Delhi water board said the capital's seven [water treatment plants](#) were shut down by the blackout, but five were back in operation by mid-morning.

The northern grid covers a vast region that is home to 28 percent of India's 1.2 billion population, and includes the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.



Map of India locating the nine states including the capital New Delhi, which

were hit by a massive power cut early Monday

"It is an accident, a failure," Shinde, the federal power minister, told reporters, adding that a special committee was being set up to probe the precise trigger for the blackout.

The Press Trust of India said initial suspicions had focused on problems at a sub-station in the Taj Mahal city of Agra that might have tripped the rest of the grid.

But Delhi Power Minister Haroon Yusuf blamed neighbouring states for overdrawing electricity.

According to the Power System Operation Corp. (PSOC), which manages the northern grid, 100 percent power had been restored to New Delhi as of 1:00 pm and 70 percent to the rest of the affected region.

The grid would be back at full capacity by the evening, said PSOC spokesman S.K. Soonee.



File photo shows office staff working by candlelight during a power cut in New Delhi. Industry leaders say electricity shortages have become a major obstacle to

economic growth in the country, which has an installed power generation capacity of 187 gigawatts -- about 20 percent of China's level.

Limited power outages are extremely common across India, which runs a peak-hour power deficit of around 12 percent, leading to constant load-shedding.

Industry leaders say electricity shortages have become a major obstacle to economic growth in the country, which has an installed power generation capacity of 187 gigawatts -- about 20 percent of China's level.

"I believe it (the outage) could be because of the great indiscipline of the states in overdrawing power -- the grid will only collapse if you overdraw," said Vivek Pandit, energy director at business lobby group the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Shinde said the speed with which the situation had been remedied compared well with similar mass outages in the developed world, including the 2003 blackout that affected much of the eastern seaboard of the United States.

"It took four days to restore power in America... our power grid is very good," he said.

Within hours of the northern region going down, electricity was brought in from the the eastern and western grids, as well as the neighbouring Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan.

"By 2014, the whole country's grids will be connected so they can take power from each other... so you won't have these problems again," Shinde said.

The last serious power outage in India was in 2001, when the northern grid crashed for around 12 hours, costing industry an estimated \$110 million in lost production.

India's fast-growing economy is heavily dependent on highly pollutant coal and imports of crude oil. Less than three percent of India's electricity comes from nuclear [power](#) but it hopes to raise the figure to 25 percent by 2050.

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Citation: Blackout hits 300 million in northern India (2012, July 30) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-07-blackout-million-northern-india.html>

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