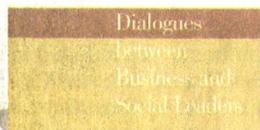
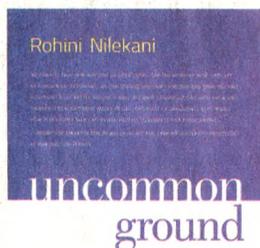


EXCERPT

# The employment exchange

Exclusive extracts from Rohini Nilekani's 'Uncommon Ground', in which Sunil Mittal and Aruna Roy debate job creation in India



**Uncommon Ground—  
Dialogues Between Business and Social Leaders:**  
Penguin/Viking,  
251 pages, ₹499.

India's demographic trajectory is such that, for the next twenty years, about 1 million people will enter the workforce every month. Will there be a sufficient number of jobs for them all? And will these jobs fulfil the aspirations of youth everywhere? What kind of livelihoods do the majority of people want for themselves?

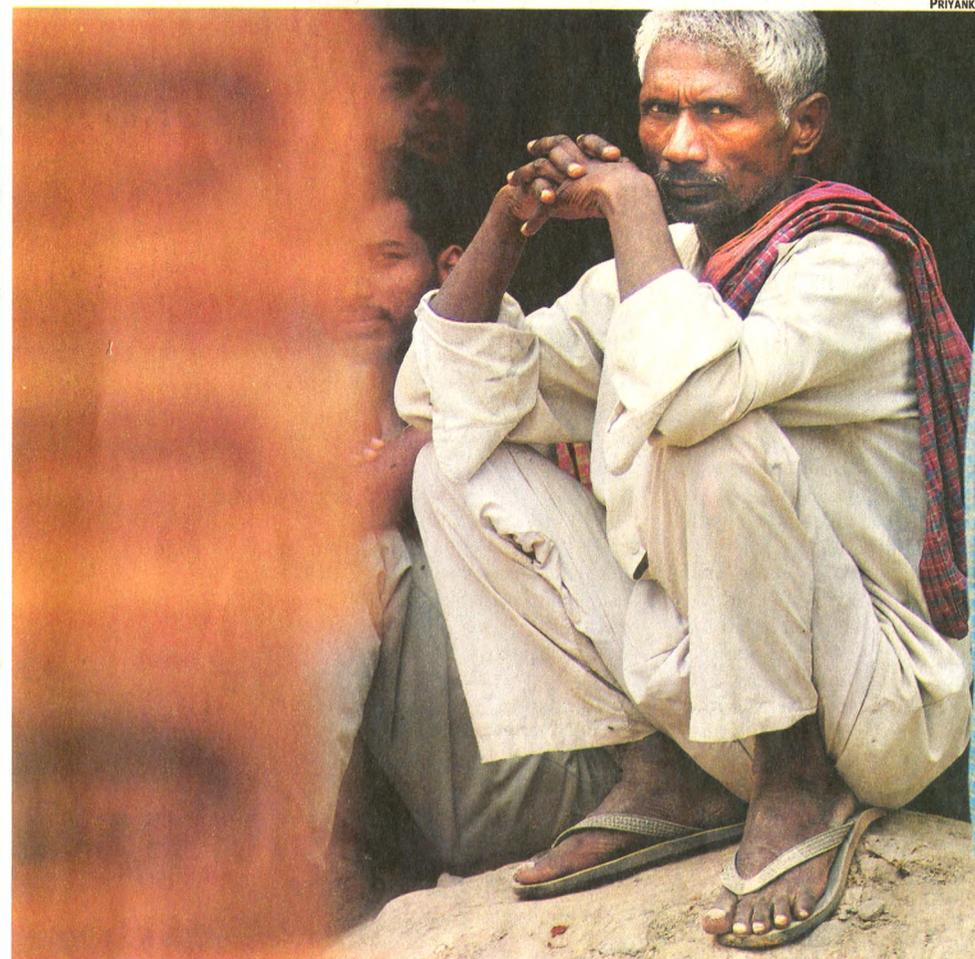
These are vexed questions that the government and society must deal with sooner rather than later. There is a flurry of activity by way of policies and programmes, to try and cash in on the demographic dividend that India is experiencing because of its vast young population. It is a window of opportunity that begins to close around 2025, when India's population will start to age dramatically. That gives us merely fifteen years to get things right and to universalize education, employability and gainful employment under decent conditions. Historians lament the fact that independent India's new leaders did not prioritize universal elementary education. ...

I am going to start with you,

but it barely touches the ground reality. The main occupation of rural people is either agriculture or employment as physical labour—either in government works or elsewhere.

So the main issue for employment of rural people, therefore, is not handicrafts—it is daily-wage work. They go and stand at *haats* from where they are hired by private companies or private people. Or they engage in migration and move elsewhere for work. Or they go and offer their services to bigger farmers. Or they go and work with government programmes. The main thing for them is employment with a skill they already possess, which is working with tools like the *ghainti*, the *phaura*, with the various implements of mud work, of plastering, of building. These are their skills, so one has to build from there. And they want employment. And they have always wanted to live with dignity. This is a myth that we always have, of people not wanting to work. India's poor work very hard, because if they don't, there will be no food at the end of the day. Much more than any of us, they have had to work.

So when I went to the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, which is a non-party political organization—we are not members of any political party but we think we have to make democracy work better—employment was a major



PRIYANKA

ARIJIT SEN/HINDUSTAN TIMES

**Labour crisis:** (from above) Sunil Mittal says we need to go back to the history of how our  
[www.rohininilekani.org](http://www.rohininilekani.org)