

21st March, 2010, Islamabad - Abbas Sajeet is 11 years old, but he doesn't go to school. Instead, he earns 2,500 rupees (\$30) a month as an auto mechanic in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad.

The money goes straight into the meager coffers of his seven-member family.

"Every day from the car garage, I see children walking to their schools," he says. "I wish I could go to school with them, finish high school and study engineering. After that, I would have a good job with a lot of money, and give it to my mother."

At least 10 million children are believed to be working in Pakistan at a variety of jobs, including some of the hardest and most poorly-paid. Some clean upper-class homes and help baby-sit. Others craft bricks, weave carpets or work in mines.

In some cases, families give their children as employees to landlords to pay off debts. That system, known as bonded labor, is likened by human rights activists to slavery. The children who work often lose their chance to attend school and are vulnerable to abusive employers.

Still, those are considered acceptable risks for the many poor families who need every member to pitch in for food, shelter and clothing. The South Asian nation has come under international pressure to reduce child labor, but there is little regulation of the practice, despite laws protecting children from exploitation in the workplace.

Source: New York Times