

## **14-day rule 'gives rise to exploitation'**

FOREIGN domestic help support groups claim a Government rule forcing all maids to return to their country of origin within 14 days of their contracts ending is an open invitation for unscrupulous employment agencies and employers.

They say the rule, brought into force in 1987, makes few exceptions and allows the exploitation of foreign domestics to go virtually unchallenged because they have little time to take action over their rights.

A spokesman for one support group said that over the past several weeks his group had dealt with nine cases where Thai women brought to Hongkong on domestic contracts were put to work in restaurants.

He said that in all nine cases the minimum requirement of one rest day a week was not granted, and wages paid were below the minimum \$3,200 rate. He said the women were reluctant to complain to Immigration or Labour authorities for fear of being sent back without a chance to find a new and proper employer.

Many of these women have paid up to \$10,000 agency fees in their home countries for an introduction to a Hongkong employer. Often they borrow the money and, to repay it, their only hope is to continue earning money in Hongkong however unsatisfactory the job.

Department of Immigration figures show 13,000 foreign domestics arrived in the territory in the past year ending October 1991. The total number in Hongkong was 83,046.

"If the 14-day rule is working," said the spokesman, "the demand in Hongkong results in more new workers coming from overseas while the workers already here — and desperate for jobs — are sent back. This is good business only for the airlines."