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EasyJet warns
of profit slump

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PROTECTIONISM'S RISE 'A DELICATE BALANCING ACT'



JAKARTA: Vendors wait for customers at a market in the Indonesian capital Jakarta yesterday. — AFP

ADS FOR FOREIGN MAIDS HIGHLIGHT POOR PAY

FINDINGS SHOW POOR TREATMENT OF MAIDS IN MIDDLE EAST

JAKARTA: A survey of ads for jobs in Asia and the Middle East found that foreign domestic workers are paid most in Hong Kong, yet earn a fraction of what they would make if they worked in wealthier countries. Activists said the survey highlighted the need for action to tackle the low salaries of migrant domestic workers in the two regions and help stamp out exploitation. Of the major countries employing migrant domestic workers in Asia and the Middle East, salaries are highest in Hong Kong, at \$567 a month, according to the study by HelperChoice, a website that connects employers with domestic workers seeking jobs.

Domestic workers, mostly women from poorer South and Southeast Asian countries, often earn more than they could back home, but far below the monthly minimum wage domestic workers earn in countries such as Australia (\$2,230) or France (\$1,866), based on 40 hours of work per week, HelperChoice said. "What the survey shows is how poorly paid domestic workers are in Asia and the Middle East," said Eman

Villanueva, a spokesperson from the Hong Kong-based Asian Migrants Coordinating Body, an umbrella group representing foreign domestic helpers in the financial hub.

He said a foreign domestic worker's salary in the city - about \$1 to \$1.40 an hour based on 12 to 16 hours of work a day - is only a third of Hong Kong's minimum wage. "If other countries in Asia and the Middle East are even lower, that's a really, really sad situation for domestic workers," Villanueva told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Activists said the findings highlight the poor treatment of maids in Asia and the Middle East, where nearly half of the world's 52 million domestic workers are employed, according to the International Labor Organization.

Families in Asia and the Middle East rely heavily on domestic workers to cook, clean and care for children as well as the elderly. Hong Kong, which has more than 300,000 foreign domestic workers, mainly from the Philippines and Indonesia, has set a minimum wage for these workers at \$556 per month,

but Villanueva said they have been pushing for a hike to at least \$645 a month and better terms. He said current employment regulations - similar across Asia and the Middle East - require a domestic worker to live with their employers without regulated working hours, encouraging abuse and exploitation.

"It creates a situation where a worker is working 24 hours non-stop. When the baby cries or when there is something to attend to, the employers can just knock on our door," said Villanueva, a Filipino who has been a domestic worker in Hong Kong for 25 years. The average salary for a domestic worker is \$439 in Singapore, \$431 in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and \$388 in Kuwait, according to the HelperChoice study. By comparison, in Thailand, the average salary for foreign maids from neighboring Myanmar is between \$123 and \$143, according to a survey by the MAP Foundation, a migrant rights group based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.— Reuters