

Weekly highlights by L'ECONOMISTE



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moved «its»
mountains**

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EDITORIAL

Holes everywhere

Khalid BELYAZID

THE miracle did not take place, and Rayan could not be saved despite all the means deployed. It is a tragedy for his family, and for the whole country which shared the hopes of that family, and today its sorrow. The best tribute that we can pay to this child is to not forget him, to learn the lessons from this accident, so that there are no more similar tragedies. This accident is the result of a type of frequent negligence and carelessness, a small hole made in the countryside, for a vital cause, that is to say access to water. And yet the digging of a well is subject to regulations and any well should always be covered or destroyed once dry. This is often not done, due to the unconsciousness of fatalistic citizens, who minimize the risk to the point of denying the danger, which leads to tragedies.

The fact is that deadly holes are everywhere. Our modern cities have open sewer manholes and dented sidewalks left as traps for school children or frail

adults; our beautiful avenues are pierced with holes, causing accidents to delivery men on mopeds, who themselves take risks when speeding to deliver a pizza; some people act irresponsibly when they add additional layers to a house until it collapses on their head; not to mention those sweat shops where one day a fire breaks out and takes the life of dozens of workers. To all this negligence by individuals, one has to add those authorities who do not enforce the regulations or hesitate to punish violators for social considerations.

Of course, for Rayan, Morocco as a country has been able to roll out mechanical means and skills and show dedication night and day that has moved a mountain literally and figuratively. It is a source of pride. But we would be prouder and safer if all the holes that cause tragedies were plugged. That would be the miracle. □

Weekly highlights

For Rayan, Morocco has moved «its» mountains

■ Despite all human and technical efforts, the child succumbed to his injuries

■ The reaction of some media and the non-respect of the right to the image is criticized

FOR a week, the world became a village named Igharam, a small village lost in the Rif mountains where little Rayan used to live. During this long week, the eyes of the world were riveted on the 32-meter well into which Rayan fell, on Tuesday, February 2. And everybody, overcome with emotion and turmoil, counted, with Rayan's parents and all Moroccans, every second that passed in the hope of seeing this little boy emerge unharmed, a little boy whose image and innocence are engraved in our hearts forever. If there are images that we will not soon forget, they are those of the unfailing and relentless efforts made by the authorities, whose control of the situation was exemplary, even exceptional. Until the last second, until the last centimeter of earth, the rescuers, true



Rescuers battled the mountain for more than 72 hours but destiny had other plans for little Rayan (Ph. AFP)

heroes of this epic adventure, maintained the hope of finding little Rayan alive, but destiny had other plans. The little angel ended up succumbing to his injuries, trapped in a hole for more

than 5 days before help could reach him. Until the last moment, Rayan's parents displayed unparalleled dignity, especially when they received the condolences of King Mohammed VI,

who called them as soon as the sad news was announced.

This tragedy has taught us new lessons. Those of an unknown and ignored Morocco. Outside of the large cities, there are little villages that have nothing to do with a little village, especially in the North. Most of the necessary infrastructure is missing. Despite this, the rescuers managed to brave and move a mountain to save little Rayan, and to bring an ambulance and even a medical helicopter to the foot of the excavations.

Morocco has once again shown that it is capable of mobilizing and providing the necessary means to help its people, whatever the cost.

The wave of reactions that followed Rayan's case--from live broadcasts to tweets detailing the progress--transformed a local story into a global drama followed by people from around the world, regardless of their language or religion. But the media will have to learn from the way they covered this case. There have been many slips and breaches of ethics in a profession that has a responsibility to be dignified, resisting the lure of «click bait», even in the most difficult moments. □

Ali ABJIOU

Reactions

FOR five days, a «race against time» was followed, live, around the world, and reactions were numerous. «Rayan's courage will remain in our memories and will continue to inspire us, as well as the dedication of the Moroccan people and of the rescue workers too», wrote AC Milan's Algerian international soccer player Ismael Bennacer, in a tweet accompanied by a drawing of a child rising into the sky hanging on a heart-shaped balloon bearing the colors of Morocco. «We had all kept hope that little Rayan would make it. This is all so tragic», Moroccan-American novelist Laila Lalami also reacted on Twitter, while French President Emmanuel Macron said on Facebook «Tonight, I want to say to the family of little Rayan and to the Moroccan people that we share their pain» □

No jab, no job

■ A seven-day period to comply with the vaccination scheme in public institutions

■ Due to the lack of a legal basis, business leaders are confused

«THE government should have adopted another approach: reach out to all stakeholders including trade unions to convince people to get vaccinated. We have more effective means of persuasion». According to Miloudi Mokharrek, Secretary General of the UMT trade union, company managers (chief financial officers and other executives) will find themselves in a delicate situation with their employees and «we must convince and not coerce [people]».

As soon as the head of government on vaccination issued his statement, the

administration began implementing its first measures. Ministerial departments quickly published internal memos urging awareness and vaccination of those who had not yet received all their jabs. A seven-day period was granted to civil servants to comply, beyond which, those who had not received all their jabs would have to «stay home». In other words, access to their workstations would be prohibited. This would be considered a deliberate cessation of work by the workers, with all the resultant consequences. Consequences would go from an initial warning to a hearing before a disciplinary council, and, eventually, to deductions from salaries and possibly abandonment of post. «Deductions from salaries are not automatic. We have regulations and rules to respect», said a senior official. In any case, some trade unions have proposed the carrot rather than the stick. «Why not give a bonus to encourage

civil servants to get vaccinated?» suggested the UMT.

While «firm instructions» issued by the head of government have been quickly applied in the public service, things have been different in the private sector. With the exception of raising awareness, they do not know how to encourage their employees to get vaccinated. Several questions have been raised: Should the head of government be taken at his word and those who reject the vaccine be terminated from their jobs? What is the legal basis for this considering that the Labor Code is silent on the issue? If employees refuse the vaccine, should they be forced to take a leave of absence and, if necessary, stop receiving all salary payments? Some trade unions fear that the «recommendations-instructions» of the head of government will open the way for abuses such as dismissals. Mokharrek even speaks of the risk of «social

siba» (a Moroccan word for «big social trouble»).

While awaiting the issuance of measures to accompany this order to vaccinate, the «General Confederation of Moroccan Companies» (CGEM) has just called upon all its members to comply with health measures and insisted on the need to sensitize its members to the importance of the third shot. «This third dose must be administered four months after the second one. For people who have contracted the virus, the third shot can be administered one month after recovery from the virus. These are the recommendations of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection», said Chakib Alj, president of the employers' confederation. These are measures necessary for a successful stimulus of the economy, especially with the opening of borders. □

Khadija MASMOUDI

Border opening Rush of passengers at airports



Departing from the Casablanca airport, hundreds of passengers were waiting yesterday morning to access the check-in counters. It was anything but social distancing (Ph. Jarfi)

■ Incoming Moroccan residents abroad, tourists, departing foreign stranded residents... Travel is resuming

■ The airport authorities' arrangements for incoming travelers

MONDAY RESULTED in an unprecedented rush at Moroccan airports and airline counters! Yesterday morning, the date of the reopening of air borders, the Mohammed V Casablanca international airport was almost full. Moroccans residing abroad, foreign residents stranded in Morocco, tourists, students, businessmen, patients requiring

follow-up, health checks, or treatment abroad, elderly people... Both in the departure and in the arrival areas, the typology of travelers is quite cosmopolitan and plural. On Monday morning, the resumption of flight programs took place in the presence of the Minister of Health, the leaders of the National Airports Authority (ONDA), the Head Governor of the Greater Casablanca area, and other senior officials (Royal Gendarmerie, Moroccan national police, Civil Protection, Customs, Auxiliary Forces...)

According to our teams of reporters on site, the instructions are firm, and the police is closely monitoring the strict compliance with health instructions. It must be said that the context is rather favorable to the reopening of borders. For the second week in a row, the decline of the Omi-

cron wave continues at the national level, at a rapid speed, said on Monday, Mouad Merabet, the coordinator of the National Center for Public Health Emergency Operations at the Ministry of Health and Social Protection.

As far as ONDA airports authority is concerned, it has implemented its arrangements for incoming flights and passengers at all airports. Indeed, ONDA has implemented a detailed plan broken down into several measures to make travel as agile as possible while taking maximum precautions.

It should be recalled that a few days ago, the government unveiled a series of legal measures and provisions relating to the management of the state of health emergency. □

Amine RBOUB

International standards: "We are not aligned"!

FOLLOWING the reopening of the sky, «the main subject at issue is the protocol for access to the national territory». Today, according to a tourism and hospitality industry player, the observation is that «the protocol put in place by the authorities is not aligned with international best practices. It is a state of mind that does not reassure us as to the possibility of a potential return to border closure and other measures of the kind. This tourism player adds: «At a time when several countries are disarming significantly and in a thoughtful way and when our hospitals are empty and our statistics exceptional..., the risk is clearly not carried by our foreign visitors who are tested and vaccinated. If there is a risk, it is rather purely a Moroccan one since the percentage of people in Morocco having taken

the 3rd jab is only 12%, so the onus is on us». Moreover, carrying out systematic antigen tests and random PCRs makes no sense. «Vaccines and PCR tests of less than 48 hours are worth nothing. It is a serious matter and a contradictory requirement», complains the same source. Moreover, at a time when, precisely, the public authorities are mobilized to try to fill the gap... the messages that we send to travelers remain vague, even distorted, adds a professional from the travel industry. «At the end of the day, we only require one thing: alignment with international standards. Such measures implemented by the Moroccan government would be more readable by all, more coherent, and less costly for our fellow citizens and our economy in general». □

Weekly highlights

Higher risks for businesses in 2022?

■ **Uncertain growth, inflation, Covid loan repayments...are generating tensions**

■ **SMEs are investing more and more in the protection of trade receivables**

THE tsunami may have been avoided thanks to support measures, but business failures have surpassed the 10,000 mark in 2022, reaching 10,556 bankruptcies according to Inforisk. This figure incorporates a catch-up effect, with bankruptcies in 2020 being abnormally low due to the lockdown and the low activity within the commercial courts and due to the stimulus generated by the economic watch committee's measures. «The level of failures is not very alarming. It is in some ways a return to normalcy», notes Mehdi Arifi founder and general manager of AssurTrade⁽¹⁾ and former general manager for credit insurance for the Maghreb region at Coface Morocco. However, the risks are on the rise with the persistence of the health crisis and the uncertainties surrounding

economic growth. The latter is expected to be around 3%. The rainfall deficit and the prospect of a more marked underperformance of agricultural GDP could compromise this forecast. Household consumption, the main driver of growth, is expected to be less vigorous due to the decline in purchasing power, which is itself linked to the

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Tourist regions seriously affected

IN the Greater Casablanca area, 3,176 businesses have closed down, a number that has risen by 9% over two years. A total of 1,337 proceedings were opened in the Rabat-Salé-Zemmour-Zaer region compared to 1,307 in 2019. On the other hand, the context has been more devastating for businesses in the most popular tourist areas. The Marrakech-Tensift-Al Haouz region has seen the number of bankruptcies increase by 35% compared to 2019. In the Souss-Massa-Draa region, another hotspot of tourist activity, bankruptcies have exploded by 71% over one year and 169% over two years. Losses in the Tangiers-Tetouan region have increased by more than one third over two years. These three regions account for more than half of the increase in failures over two years. In the tourism ecosystem, the restaurant and hospitality industry has officially lost 433 units. Car rental companies are also paying a heavy price for the crisis with 178 bankruptcies recorded last year. Overall, trade, real estate, and construction account for 69% of business failures. □

increase in consumer prices. The geopolitical risk and accelerating inflation also threaten the global recovery and, by way of consequence, the demand for Moroccan products and services. Despite this hazy context, specialists note some positive signals from cer-

tain trading partners, including Spain. This country has a good performance in terms of vaccination and economic recovery, which is rather encouraging for exports to this market. This said, supply difficulties and rising input prices are frustrating and are likely to weaken the cash flow of companies. This is one of the elements to watch

linked to social interaction and mobility such as catering and the hospitality industry, local retail, and transport would be more vulnerable to the economic situation. In the construction and public works sector, which is heavily dependent on public orders, the short-term outlook is uncertain due to the lengthening terms of payment and the increasing production costs. In this context, companies, especially SMEs, are developing a survival instinct and are increasingly in the protection of the customer base. «Companies are more selective and this is something we are seeing more and more in the field. They resort more to mechanisms to secure their trade receivables and to absorb the disturbances linked to the hazards of the business climate», notes the general manager of AssurTrade. Moreover, it is an additional argument to better negotiate with financial institutions. «They are more inclined to support companies that secure their trade receivables because the risk of customer default is controlled», notes Mehdi Arifi. □

Franck FAGNON

(1) The company is active in the entire value chain of the protection of trade receivables, offering credit management solutions, collection management tools, insurance programs, and access to financing

A new «Doing Business» being developed

■ **It should be called «Business Enabling Environment (BEE)»**

■ **The World Bank Group reactivates its global network of experts**

■ **Created in 2002, the index had been stopped due to irregularities**

THE Doing Business will soon be something of the past. The World Bank Group is currently working on a new index. According to the information we have received, the Doing Business

will be replaced by the project «Business Enabling Environment (BEE)». It goes without saying that the title of the index could be changed once finalized. It is based on a new approach to assess more objectively the business and investment climate around the world, as announced by the World Bank Group who is reactivating its global network of experts who participated in the development of the Doing Business. It should be noted that about twenty respondents were collaborating with the World Bank group in Morocco. They were notified yesterday, Wednesday, February 9, that a new index was being prepared without giving further details. The information related to this project should be published soon on

the net. The World Bank portal will serve as a one-stop shop to publish indicators and resources related to the business environment. For the time being, participants have not been briefed on the new approach to assess the business climate around the world.

Experts were asked to be prepared to continue their collaboration once the Business Enabling Environment Index project is launched. Respondents also received their certificate of participation in the development of the Doing Business Index.

To assess the business environment around the world as accurately as possible and with quality data, World Bank experts rely on respondents in each country to describe

the impact of reforms on the ground and on business life.

This work is done on a voluntary basis. The names of those who contributed to the development of the global Doing Business indicators are published in the final report, and a certificate of appreciation is given to them.

Created in 2002, the first Doing Business report was released in 2003. It covered 133 economies. The latest one, in 2020, scrutinizes 199 countries. The ranking has enabled many countries to implement reforms to improve their business climate and strengthen the role of the private sector, particularly of SMEs and VSEs, in development. □

HASSAN EL ARIF