

# Weekly highlights by L'ECONOMISTE

30 ans de fidélité



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## EDITORIAL

## Greed

Radia LAHLOU

**M**ARRAKECH is coming back to life, and the morale of tourism professionals is in good shape. The privileged tourist destination is back to levels that we could not even imagine a few months earlier: 71% of its air capacity in 2019! Behind this improvement hides hard work, that of the authorities who have largely invested to keep the tourism ship afloat, and the inextinguishable will of the actors to keep the sector in life, because they believe in it. A third point and not the least, is the revived confidence of the TOs and the airline companies which have renewed their agenda with Morocco, and which continue to program new routes and connections to “fill” the order books. This is reflected on the tarmac by an increasing number of arrivals, and in the streets of Marrakech by nationalities of all kinds. The most numerous visitors are Israeli tourists to be found everywhere, due to the efforts of the two countries to stimulate trade and tourism. Hotels in the

city are also full of incentives, MICEs (Meetings, incentives, conferences & exhibitions), conventions, VIP weddings and festivals. Marrakech is totally ready for summer. Idyllic image, which we fear to see broken by any violent shock. What should not be overlooked, however, is that for a long time Marrakech had to fight its own demons, those before Covid. Smells of depravity and deceit that have earned the capital of tourism the derogatory nickname of “arnakech” (Marrakech ripoff or “Marripoff”). The authorities then strove to educate and train the stakeholders related to tourism, starting with the guides. Today, though on the surface things seem to be back to normal, the threat of a loophole in the system is to be feared. One still has to persuade or deter merchants and cab drivers from keeping charging prices that are beyond belief. Their unbridled greed could ruin the promotional efforts made by a whole range of public and private professionals. □



## Weekly highlights

## Marrakech is gradually recovering its air traffic

**T**HE month of June will be a very busy month for tourism in Marrakech. Hotels are almost full while two luxury hotels are simply privatized for the needs of a wedding. It must also be said that the June calendar is well stocked with an important animation. These are the Laughter Festival, 12 concerts of Gnaoua as part of the Gnaoua Festival Tour, and exhibitions in all the museums and galleries of the city, not to mention the Science Week which is held at the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University. These are the fruits of the reopening of air borders by the Moroccan authorities but also of the cancellation of the obligation to take a PCR test. Since February 7, the date of the resumption of air traffic, reservations have been raining on Marrakech. The month of April ended with an average occupancy rate (O.R.) of 45% according to the Regional Hospitality Industry Association. And while waiting for final statistics, hoteliers probably did much better during the



*Internationally, Marrakech has recovered 71% of its airport movements compared to 2019 and is preparing to welcome new air routes. Here are the new companies and routes for summer of 2022 compared to summer of 2019 (Ph. L'Economiste)*

month of May. Some hotels closed the month of May with an 80% occupancy rate. As usual, it is the weekends that attract the most domestic tourists. On the international scene, Marrakech recovered 71% of its airport movements compared to 2019, the reference year, and recovered 63% of its passengers. Moreover, the Moroccan

airports authority (ONDA) forecasts estimate that 2022 will end with 4 million passengers coming to Marrakech by plane. Indeed, new routes are being opened, such as Edinburgh operated by Ryanair UK, Rome Fiumicino by Wizz Air Hungary, Madeira by Binter, and Alicante and Limoges by Ryanair Ltd... Even if 100% of the capacity of

2019 is reached again, these capacities will remain insufficient for a city like Marrakech whose bed infrastructure is very developed (80,000 beds and 1,200 guest houses), says, for his part, Hamid Bentahar, president of the Regional Council of Tourism (CRT) for the Marrakech / Safi region.

*"It is mechanical. The more seats there are, the more hotels will be able to increase their average occupancy rate, and the more investments there will be, the more jobs there will be",* insists the professional. As a reminder, the "Ocher City" (as Marrakech is nicknamed) recorded nearly 8 million overnight stays in 2019, the reference year, with an occupancy rate of 61%. The actors of the Marrakech tourism industry were working at that time to set the bar higher and achieve an occupancy rate of 70%. Unfortunately, the consequences of Covid have been fatal for the sector for the past two years. *"But the ambitions are still the same",* says Bentahar. □

**Badra BERRISSOULE**

## Compulsory Medical Insurance

## The challenge for RAMED beneficiaries

**I**T'S like a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces come together each month as the implementing decrees are published. The generalization of compulsory health insurance to self-employed and independent workers is progressing, and one of the important parts awaits the amendment of Law 65-00 on medical coverage. The arrival of the beneficiaries of RAMED (Medical Assistance Regime) scheduled to start in the second half of the year can only take place once the law on medical coverage has been amended and the implementing legislation have been published. The arrival at the National Social Security Agency (CNSS) of this vulnerable population will be made in exchange for a contribution, which will be borne by the Government: 6.37% of the minimum wage. It is a question of making RAMED beneficiaries benefit from a basket of care identical to that of private sector employees. For the moment, the operational plan for the changeover to an insurance system has not yet been decided and several questions will have to be settled: will the beneficiaries of RAMED pay the



*More than 6 billion MAD are programmed to rehabilitate and strengthen health entities (Ph. L'Economiste)*

costs for care services if they go to private sector healthcare facilities? Will they benefit from the direct payment by insurers' system?

These are so many questions on which policies are expected to be established in order to make vulnerable populations, amounting to 5.5 million people, benefit from the Compulsory Medical Insurance (AMO) managed by

the Social Security agency. Started in 2021, the extension of medical coverage to self-employed workers and to individuals must be completed before the end of this year. For now, tight management of the different categories is planned. Eventually, 8.5 million policyholders and 22 million beneficiaries will join the compulsory health insurance scheme. This will result in a

significant increase in the activity of the Social Security agency. The number of insured people should increase from 3.5 million to 11 million people while the number of beneficiaries will be multiplied by 4, moving from 7 to 29 million. As for the number of disease records, it should reach 80,000 to 90,000 files per day versus nearly 20,000 today. This is a ramp-up for which the Social Security agency (CNSS) has been preparing for several months. Its information system is adapted to support a different population of employees and to strengthen its capacity to process a much greater flow of data and transactions. CNSS has also reviewed its organization and its processes. CNSS has also carried out the necessary recruitments and established partnerships to be closer to the insured. The Social Security agency has also invested in digitalization, and a large part of the procedures can be carried out remotely. CNSS also plans total paperless processes as well as the implementation of the electronic healthcare sheet. □

**Khadija MASMOUDI**



## Schoolbooks, more expensive next year

**A**T the end of a meeting held on Wednesday, May 25, the Interministerial Commission on Prices at the Department of Competition, Prices and Subsidies (of the Ministry of Finance), granted schoolbook publishers an initial increase of 25% from the next school year. This decision comes in response to recurring complaints from publishers dating back more than six months due to the soaring price of paper on the international scene.

*"We have been asking for a revision of the price of books for more than six months, which has remained frozen for 20 years while all the inputs have experienced a vertiginous increase. On Thursday, May 26, paper was trading at 1,520 euros per ton versus 650 to 700 euros last December. This will result in an increase in the price of school notebooks and of reams of paper, among other things",* explains a publisher. This increase is attributed to the surge in the price of raw materials and maritime freight and to the closure of the main pulp mills in the world due to Covid for several months at the height of the pandemic. The increase in paper prices has had a negative impact on margins in the publishing industry since the start of the health crisis. As a result, the authorization given to publishers by the Inter-



Regulated by the Interministerial Commission, the price of schoolbooks has not changed since 2002 despite repeated requests from publishers to increase it (Ph. L'Economiste)

nisterial Commission on Prices is timely.

Indeed, the situation had become untenable for the publishers: *"Under these conditions, without a helping hand from the Government, we would be unable to print the textbooks for the next school year. And even a 25% increase is still insufficient because the increase in the price of paper is much greater",* says a publisher. Another stakeholder adds by stating that the price of paper has increased by more than 120%. This is why people from the industry asked on a regular basis for a 66% increase to absorb the soaring price of paper. But in a context marked by general increases,

the Interministerial Commission had to adopt a middle-of-the-road solution by authorizing a 25% increase in the price of schoolbooks as a first phase. Assurances have been given to the industry about a potential further increase if the price of paper continues to rise next year. Interviewed by L'Economiste, two professionals are of the opinion that it is better than nothing and that the main thing is that textbooks should be available on time. Textbooks cover primary to baccalaureate. The schoolbook market is estimated at 25 million copies, 70% of which are distributed directly to students as part of the (Moroccan Government's)

*"1 million schoolbags"* operation. This figure has been maintained for symbolism only because, in fact, 4.5 million schoolbags are distributed each year via the INDH (National Initiative for Human Development) program. The remaining 30% are purchased by students from booksellers and private schools, which encroach on booksellers' turf. Booksellers have been constantly denouncing this situation by challenging private schools' possibility of buying schoolbooks to resell them to students. It is therefore the students of the private sector who will be impacted by the price increase since they do not benefit from the *"1 million schoolbags"* operation, the budget of which was set this year at 450 million MAD (about USD 45 million). The budget is intended to cover the purchase of schoolbooks, school uniforms, supplies, and transport costs. According to the estimates of a professional, the 25% increase represents approximately 70 million MAD, which will fall into the purse of publishers. This is at most a band-aid because of the very low price of the book used in the public, compared to that of the private sector and of schoolbooks used in public European schools in Morocco which sometimes exceed 400 MAD. □

Hassan ELARIF

## Operation Marhaba: A series of customs measures

**A**FTER a break that lasted two years, a period coinciding with the restrictions linked to the health crisis, Operation Crossing the Strait is resuming. The Moroccan-Spanish joint commission for the transit of Moroccans residing Abroad (M.R.A) during the summer holidays met a few days ago, defining the measures intended to improve the crossing (of the Straits of Gibraltar) by Moroccan nationals, including the registration of more than thirty ferries that will connect Morocco to the main Spanish, French, and Italian ports through nearly 570 weekly connections.

Customs issued a circular on Tuesday, May 31 on measures dedicated to M.R.As. Among these is the extension until December 31, 2022 of the temporary admission (T.A.) of vehicles blocked in Morocco due



This year, around thirty ferries will provide more than 570 weekly maritime connections between Morocco and the main Spanish, French, and Italian harbors (Ph. L'Economiste)

to restrictions on international travel due to Covid. The system concerns vehicles whose car registration expires at the end of the years 2020, 2021, and 2022. People wishing to collect a new T.A. card are asked to contact the Customs services of

their choice. Customs also authorizes the transfer of motor vehicles imported for temporary admission between non-residents living in different countries if the beneficiary of the transfer (seller) is the owner of the vehicle.

This year, the Customs administration also abolished the authorization to drive abroad a vehicle imported under the admission procedure for the benefit of the spouse, descendant, or ascendant of the holder of the AT card. In the event of loss of it, the holder can obtain a duplicate on the basis of a simple sworn statement made by the holder without being obliged to present a declaration of loss or theft issued by the competent authorities. All customs measures have been included in the *"Moroccans of the World 2022"* guide. A vade mecum which can be downloaded from the [www.douane.gov.ma](http://www.douane.gov.ma) website. All the entities of the Customs administration have been invited to respect the application of these measures and to pay particular attention to the grievances and claims of users. □

H.E.



# Weekly highlights



## African Champions League A 3rd star on the Wydad coat of arms

- A feat that consecrates Moroccan domination in continental competitions
- A 100% Moroccan African Super Cup in prospect
- Exemplary organization of the final

ONE more victory, the third one, for the Wydad Athletic Club (WAC). After 1992 and 2017, the Casablanca club has now managed to win its third African Champions League cup. A memorable evening, last Monday in Casablanca. After the final whistle, the people from Casablanca had a sleepless night. The esplanade of the Hassan II Mosque and the Ain Diab seaside promenade experienced unforgettable moments, with thousands of Moroccans out in the streets to celebrate the African coronation. WAC coach Walid Regueragui and team captain Yahya Jabrane received a phone call from HM King Mohammed VI. A royal message of congratulations was also sent to the members of the club.

■ **Conquering Africa:** However, at the start of the season, the “Widadis” were rather skeptical, expecting great difficulties, after the departure of certain executive players, who formed the backbone of the team. WAC’s troubles deepened after FIFA banned



After the victory of the RSB soccer club in the CAF Cup final two weeks ago, the 2022 African Super Cup will be 100% Moroccan, for the first time in the history of this competition. These performances are in addition to those of the local national team, champion of the last two editions of the CHAN (Ph. Bziouat)

the recruitment of new players during the last transfer window. However, the men of Walid Regueragui braved all the difficulties, to do justice to the slogan carried by the supporters on a banner a few weeks ago: “*The Conquerors of the continent*”. A faultless course, having eliminated heavyweights from Africa, including Zamalek from Egypt, Petro Atletico from Angola... And at the end of the course, a final score of 2-0 against team of Al Ahly of Egypt, a club having cumulated the greatest number of titles in Africa. A match marked by the exemplary refereeing by South African Victor Gomes. The only downside was the managers and

players of Al Ahly of Egypt, who confirmed their reputation as “*bad losers*”, lacking in courtesy towards the host country and towards the CAF organizers.

■ **Infantino, Motsepe...** From the organizational standpoint, everyone was fearing that some excesses might happen during this sold-out match. Especially since the officials of the Egyptian Club had multiplied provocations for several weeks, pointing to safety conditions. Fears also arose after the failures that marred the organization of the European Champions League final last Saturday, May 24, in Paris. Howe-

ver, Morocco has once again shown its ability to succeed in an exemplary organization of this event, even in the opinion of the Egyptian officials who were present. It is no coincidence that Qatar, which is hosting the next World Cup, is seeking Moroccan expertise in this area. Last Monday, FIFA President Gianni Infantino and CAF President Patrice Motsepe witnessed the flawless organization showed by the Moroccan authorities. This final match of the most prestigious club competition in Africa is also a promotional factor for Morocco as a destination. Especially with the worldwide good image of the Moroccan public doing breathtaking shows in the grandstands. This was an electric atmosphere, which has attracted several international celebrities, including FC Barcelona star Ousmane Dembélé. □

Mohamed Ali Mrabi

### Super Cup

THE coronation of WAC is also a consecration of Moroccan supremacy over African football. After RSB’s victory in the CAF Cup final two weeks ago, the 2022 African Super Cup will be 100% Moroccan, for the first time in the history of this competition. These achievements are to be added to those of the local national team, which won the last two editions of the African Nations Championship (CHAN). The WAC club will also represent Morocco in the next edition of the Club World Cup. □