

# Weekly highlights by L'ECONOMISTE



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EDITORIAL

Fatal blow

Radia LAHLOU

**Q**UITE frankly, when it comes to tourism, we are not about to win the game. All those "recovery" campaigns carried out at full speed to reinvigorate Morocco as a destination seem to have worked. The Moroccan Airports Authority (ONDA), which has just published its July figures, reports 3-digit percentages in seaside and classic destinations. And August promises to be just as abundant. There you go, it's done. Tourists have returned, but the basic problems have remained the same. Quality of service has not made a miraculous leap forward, but prices have. Increasing prices is something we know how to do, but it is not the most serious problem. What is most repugnant to tourists, who vent out their feelings on social media, are the other inconveniences: harassment, purse snatching, forced purchases, violence, dirt on the beaches, road accidents... Without forgetting one of the tragedies of this summer, the death of a female tourist under the assaults of a pack of dogs, which was a fatal blow. All these facts are serious, very serious, and their viral impact undoubtedly harms Morocco as a destination. Governments

concerned about the safety of their nationals call for relentless caution, because in Morocco, anything can happen. When someone conducts operations of this magnitude to bring visitors back, one deploys an equally consistent strategy, as is the case of Operation Crossing the Strait, which is thought down to the smallest detail and with the participation of several ministries, to make the stay of the Moroccans Living Abroad one of the best there is. And even that gets out of hand, because we're bogged down in the culture of half-measures!

It was only the royal warning shots that have put the train back on track. The latest warning shot was this week, on August 20. Where have our good manners, our civic values, and our education gone? If we remain dominated by this precarious vision of tourism, namely, to increase the number of overnight stays, without remedying the secondary aspects that are part of a tourist package, if we do not put in place a truly integrated tourism strategy, we will lose our visitors who will leave for other more pleasant destinations. □

## Weekly highlights

# Sahara: Laying cards on the table

MOROCCO no longer accepts ambiguous positions. This is one of the main messages of the royal address, delivered on the occasion of the 69th anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the people. After the great breakthroughs achieved at the regional and international levels, favorable to the just and legitimate position of the Kingdom, Rabat requires its partners, traditional or new, to lay their cards on the table. HM the King could not have been clearer: for these countries, “whose positions on the question of the Sahara are ambiguous”, Morocco is waiting “for them to clarify and review the substance of their position, in a way that is not ambiguous”. Among the traditional partners of Morocco, France for example still seems to hesitate on the position to take concerning this question. The French leaders prefer a still ambiguous position, to avoid offending Algeria. President Emmanuel Macron is expected this week in Algeria. The ambition of the French president is in particular to “turn the page on a series of misunderstandings and tensions”, say the sources.

■ **Prism:** Today, Paris, like other partners of Morocco, must change its positions with regard to the ques-



During the royal address on the occasion of the 69th anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the people, the Sovereign sent a clear message to everyone (Ph. MAP)

tion of the territorial integrity of the Kingdom. On this point, the Sovereign sent a “clear message to everyone: the Sahara issue is the prism through which Morocco considers its international environment. It is also clearly and simply the yardstick that measures the sincerity of the friendships and of the effectiveness of the partnerships that (Morocco) establishes”. This new phase in the management of Morocco’s diplomatic relations comes after many influential countries have shown their receptivity and support for the autonomy initiative. This is considered to be the only possible way to settle this

regional and artificial conflict. This hardening of the Moroccan position follows the absence of a positive reaction from Algeria, to which the Sovereign has extended his hand on several occasions. The eastern neighbor continues to make Morocco its favorite external enemy, to divert attention from the internal risks of implosion.

■ **Momentum :** Whatever the case may be, the momentum set in motion by Morocco in the Southern provinces seems irreversible. Especially with the broad international support for the Moroccan proposal, in the

face of the immobility of the other parties. This is demonstrated in particular by the position of the United States which, notwithstanding the change of Administration or the evolution of the economic situation, has remained constant. Ditto for Spain, which has opted for a clear and responsible position. In Europe, only France and a few other countries still seem to hesitate. In contrast, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Serbia, Hungary, Cyprus, Romania, and other countries seem to adopt a constructive approach vis-à-vis the autonomy initiative. Ditto for a large part of the Arab and African countries, which have clearly shown their support for the Moroccanness of the Sahara. Today, about forty per cent of African States, belonging to five regional groupings, have opened consulates in the cities of Laayoune and Dakhla.

■ **Internal front :** In addition to diplomatic breakthroughs, HM the King also insisted on the importance of the unity of the internal front to “counteract the maneuvers of the enemies”. Internal mobilization is “the base on which any strategy for the defense of the Moroccanness of the Sahara must rest”. □

Mohamed Ali MRABI

## Moroccans Living Abroad: The great “return”

THE Moroccan diaspora is rubbing its hands. While it believed that the case of the institutional representation of Moroccans Living Abroad had been archived, now the King puts it back at the heart of the news, especially since about ten years ago there was a ministry in its own right, responsible for Moroccans Living Abroad. Subsequently, the Ministry was transformed into a delegated ministry before disappearing from the radar. Moreover, its abolition was formalized with the government of Aziz Akhannouch, which fueled questions in the circles of the Moroccan community living abroad. Today, the issue resurfaces due to the royal will. For the Moroccan diaspora, these are welcome news. In the meantime, what will the Head of Government do to materialize the royal instructions? It is too early



to tell but the Head of Government has certainly mobilized again his staff to see how to translate, in an effective way, the dimensions of the

royal message relating to Moroccan citizens living abroad. In any case, the executive branch of Government will have an easy task since the royal

intervention includes a roadmap to better mobilize the diaspora which remains attached to its country of origin, even for the third and fourth generations. One of the first actions that Aziz Akhannouch will have to take is remedying a mistake made when he formed his government. Indeed, the governmental architecture had ignored this population whose number exceeds 5 million people to which it will be necessary to add the hundreds of thousands of Moroccan Jews scattered throughout the world and who remain deeply attached to their country of origin. It is in this spirit that the King called for the establishment of a support mechanism for Moroccan skills and talents living abroad. The goal is to listen to them and communicate with them to encourage them to invest in their native country. □

Mohamed CHAOUI

## Football: Lekjaa's ultimatum

**W**ILL the football clubs of the First Division (Botola 1) and Second Division (Botola 2) which have not transformed themselves into a public sports limited company be deprived of a championship this year? In any case, Fouzi Lekjaa, president of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF), who brandished this threat on July 22, 2019 in Skhirat, has just taken action. At least, this is what emerges from the letter Lekjaa has just sent to all the club presidents. Fouzi Lekjaa summons them to perform before August 31 the actions decided by the Federation's steering committee and during discussions with the National Professional Football League (LNFP). Thus, the clubs, which are all supposed to have transformed themselves into public limited companies a few years ago, are required to have both their new articles of incorporation and the agreement binding the association to the public limited company be approved by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. As a reminder, the clubs in question had received a grant of 2.5 million Dirhams (MAD, about 250,000 USD) to benefit from the support of



*Fouzi Lekjaa intends to push the entire football ecosystem to design a typically moroccan model*

an accounting firm and switch from the status of simple sports association to that of a limited company as provided for by Law No. 30-09 on physical education and sports. But apparently not all formalities have been completed by all clubs. Concerning this point, the Federation will have to take action against the persons responsible for these breaches, which include for some clubs the fact of not having registered the new public limited

company in the Trade Register. Clubs that have not yet completed this formality are required to do so urgently during the week separating them from the president's ultimatum. The president of the Royal Moroccan Football Federation also enjoins football clubs to transfer to the public limited company all the sports contracts binding them to the associations. In the same vein, new recruits will have to sign their sports contract exclusively

with a public limited company and no longer with an association. Contracts that are not accompanied by all the deeds required by the Federation will be rejected by the Players' Status Commission. The letter sent by the president of the Football Federation to the presidents of clubs gives a total of four weeks to latecomers to comply, which means that they are called upon to accomplish in a few weeks what they have not performed for two years.

The goal of this ultimatum is to push the former football associations to transform themselves into public limited companies approved at a general meeting, having a legal structure with a board of directors, publishing their annual balance sheet on a regular basis, and holding accounts certified by audit firms, among other formalities, and become entities ready to open up their capital to investors in order to meet international standards. The other component of the strategy advocated by the President of the Federation involves training, a component that remains marked by nepotism, by the very admission of the boss of national football. □

Hassan EL ARIF

## Back-to-school hot issues

**I**N a context marked by uncertainties, the start of the new school year promises to be very tense. The issue of water will be the big unknown. It must be the primary concern of the Government, but also of farmers and citizens, especially since, if it does not rain in September, the future will be somewhat compromised. It is sowing time and without water in the dams, no one will want to predict the future. The alternative presented by desalination stations will not be able to bear fruit immediately. The picture darkens when one thinks of soaring prices, galloping inflation, and a Compensation Fund (of subsidies to basic commodities) under pressure. These are so many constraints that the Government will put on the table during the social dialogue session in September. In principle, the provisions of the agreement of last April 30 should be applied from next month onwards. This was to be the case with the five percent increase in the minimum wage. However, for the time being, the implementing decree



*In the face of a very complicated economic situation, social discontent is growing. For the start of the school year, many issues are on the table of the Government*

has not yet been published. Ditto for the increases in family allowances which will have to move from 36 to 100 Dirhams for the fourth, fifth, and sixth child. All of this will have to be budgeted for in the Draft Budget Law for 2023, which is currently being prepared. This legislation must be tabled in Parliament before October 20th.

■ **The spotlight on the return to Parliament after the summer break:** The reopening of the Parliamentary session

will be closely scrutinized. Indeed, the opening of the autumn session will be inaugurated by the King who will deliver a speech to the MPs of the two chambers in joint session. This event will mark the real political return and the speech will be considered as the roadmap for the coming year. In any case, within the House of Representatives, several pieces of legislation are expected. The star is undoubtedly the Draft Budget Law for 2023, which will occupy most of the time in Parliament.

Also on the menu is the reform of the organic budget law.

■ **Increasing the share of private investment :** The idea is to reverse the current trend in the distribution of these investments in order to allow the private sector to make two-thirds of the overall investment by 2035. In addition to the creation of stable jobs and the reduction of disparities between provinces in terms of attracting investment, the Government wants to direct investment towards priority sectors and professions of the future. Also on the menu is the incentive to substitute imports with local production.

■ **After the reform of the health system, 6 bills in the pipeline:** The other framework bill on the agenda of the extraordinary session involves the reform of the health system. Other legislative and regulatory pieces of legislation are also being prepared. Indeed, 6 bills are in the pipeline to support the generalization of social protection. □

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## Weekly highlights

# A museum for the Jewish memory of the North



The Beit Yehouda museum center within the Assayag synagogue will bring Jewish memory to life in Northern Morocco (Photo by Adam)

**T**ANGIERS finally has a space to remember its Jewish history. The Assayag Synagogue, one of the oldest in this city, has been restored, and a museum space was inaugurated there last week. The project was led by the Agency for the Promotion and Development of the North (APDN), the wilaya of Tangiers-Tetouan-Al Hoceïma, and the Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication. The cost of the works has reached 2 million Dirhams (about 200,000 USD) financed by the Ministry of Culture. The building located at Petit Socco, in the heart of the medina of Tangiers, dates back more than a century and has been abandoned for about sixty years. In parallel with the rehabilitation work of the synagogue, the committee of the Jewish community of Tangiers is committed to financing and carrying out the scenography work and the museum space "Beit Yehouda" for the preservation and promotion of the cultural heritage that is specific to the Jews established in the North of Morocco. The museum houses 3 exhibition halls, as well as corridors around the patio of the synagogue, and a souvenir shop. There



are also plans to create a study and research center dedicated to Sephardic Judaism in northern Morocco. It should be remembered that this

rehabilitation project is part of the royal vision which encourages the restoration of all places of worship, considered as spaces for cultural dialogue, and falls within the framework of the rehabilitation project of the medina of Tangiers. Not far from there, as a witness to the contemporary history of Tangiers, Dar Niaba has been transformed into an artist's house. Located in the heart of the medina of Tangiers, this project aims to provide young people and artists with an open place for creation, exchange, and learning. The rehabilitation of the building required the mobilization of a total amount of 14 million MAD (1.4 million USD) for the identical renovation of built spaces and for scenography work. The new configuration of Dar Niaba offers a cultural space, over a total area of 1,841 sqm, housing a multipurpose room, exhibition halls, workshops for painting and photography, the treatment of works, sculpture, and ceramics, in addition to ancillary spaces such as a cafeteria. The management of the artist's house has been delegated to the National Foundation of Museums of Morocco. □

Ali ABJIOU