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EDITORIAL

GMT

Ahlam NAZIH

«**I**F only we could keep our GMT time zone! « How many times have you heard this phrase? Every Ramadan, when the clocks are set back by an hour, an old «trauma» is awakened in some people, that of having lost an hour, with the feeling of a watch going crazy. A watch out of step with reality. At the end of the holy month, many people express the hope of a permanent return to the GMT time zone, and each time, their hopes are dashed. What is the objective assessment of GMT+1 today? Have Moroccans finally gotten used to it, or do they still suffer from this hour too late all year round? Have the claimed energy and economic gains been achieved? No assessment has been carried out for years, nor any detailed study for that matter, apart from the one carried out by the Department of Administrative Reform relating to time change between 2012 and 2017, when the decision was made in 2018.

For many Moroccans, this perpetuated summertime was experienced as a real curiosity, a decision abruptly imposed, difficult to bear, but at first tolerated, as it was accompanied by a promise to review it, after assessing its effects, after an initial assessment, presented as «positive», carried out after a few months (between October 2018 and March 2019), no new assessments were shared. Not a word, nor the shadow of a debate. Yet the Government had announced periodic monitoring of the impact of maintaining daylight saving time over 5 years. Admittedly, this was an initiative taken under the previous Government. Nevertheless, nothing prevents the current team from working on this subject, which is of concern to a considerable number of Moroccans. A thorough assessment would enable the issue to be settled once and for all, to give meaning to a brutal decision, or on the contrary, to repair what some see as an «injustice». □

Weekly highlights

Textiles and leather

Underperformance, but also potential for growth

THE latest report from the Foreign Exchange Office on the textile industry 2024, analyzing the last two decades (2002/2022), continues to reveal its secrets. This methodical and meticulous investigation certainly supports the crucial role of the textile and apparel sector, but also shows that its recent trajectory is stumbling against persistent challenges. An in-depth look at the data and trends reveals a complex landscape, where apparel and accessories exports are a real engine of growth, but also a landscape where competition and internal obstacles present significant impediments. Exports of textile products, particularly cotton shirts, suits, and pants, have been some of the mainstays of the Moroccan economy. However, despite generally stable performance, Morocco's market share in certain segments, such as knitted garments, is showing signs of stagnation or even slight decline. This trend raises questions about the need to adjust export strategies to maintain compe-

titiveness on the global market.

Analysis of target markets also reveals some interesting dynamics. While Morocco's market share in Africa increased until 2017 before declining, its share of the European market showed a downward trend over the period under review. These movements underline the importance of diversifying trade outlets to mitigate the risks associated with dependence on certain markets.

Despite these successes, the Moroccan textile industry faces major challenges. The predominance of subcontracting, low export diversification and concentration on low value-added products are all obstacles to be overcome. To remain competitive, the industry will have to invest in innovation, diversify its products and focus on higher value-added segments. The industry will also need to pay close attention to its performance and underperformance, both of which represent growth opportunities.

Over the 2012-2022 period, the number of active exporters has



shown contrasting trends. After an increase between 2012 and 2014, from 917 to 949 operators, a decline in the number of companies active in export was noted from 2015 onwards. This decline is attributable

to the tough competition encountered by the sector, particularly in the subcontracting component, provided by countries where labor costs are considerably low. □

Radia LAHLOU

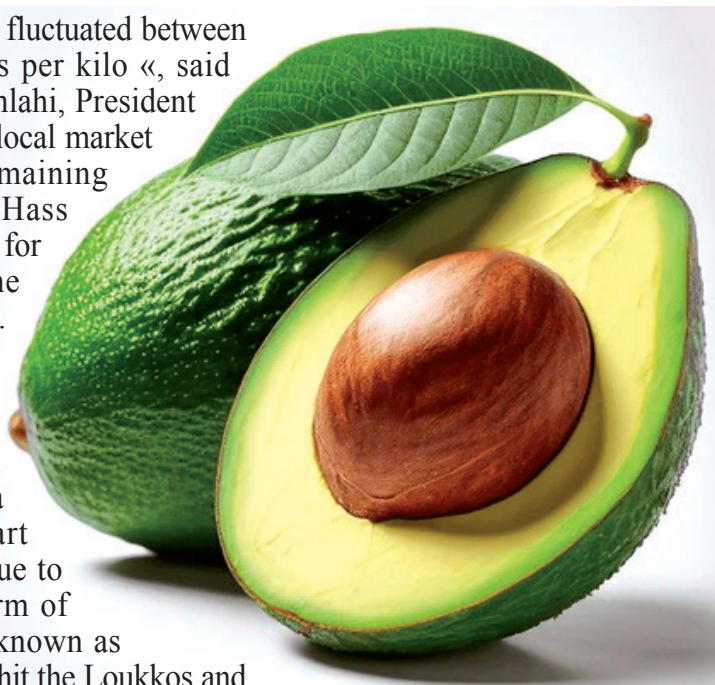
Avocado: Full steam ahead with exports

THE 2023-2024 avocado season is drawing to a close. Despite the water crisis, the industry has maintained its growth, recording a new performance with national production of 65,000 tons, according to the Morocco Avocado Association (MAVA). The previous season's production was 40,000 tons. This significant 62.5% increase has had a positive impact on shipments of this fruit, which is highly prized internationally.

«The harvest runs from October to March. This year's results are very positive. Production reached 65,000 tons, with exports reaching 57,000 tons. The main destinations are European countries such as Spain, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, and Russia. Small volumes are also sold to Gulf countries, notably the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Ara-

bia. Prices have fluctuated between 2.5 and 4 euros per kilo », said Abdellah Elyamlahi, President of MAVA. The local market absorbs the remaining volumes. The Hass variety, popular for its flavor, is the most dominant. Other varieties grown include Fuerte, Zutano, and Bacon.

Despite a very tough start to the season due to the violent storm of wind and rain known as Bernard, which hit the Loukkos and Gharb regions last October, the industry managed to resist. The strong winds, reaching up to 110 kilometers per hour, caused the avocados to fall. «These were of very small caliber.



They were not suitable for export and were therefore sold on the local market», stresses Abdellah Elyamlahi, adding «This year, we have a size problem. The avocados are smaller».

This reduces the Moroccan fruit's chances on international markets, where competition is fierce with an abundant supply of large-caliber avocados. When asked about the impact of the drought on the industry, the President of MAVA reassured us. «It is the Southern regions that are suffering from a lack of water. In the North, where avocado is grown, agricultural water resources are good. There is the Loukkos river. Groundwater reservoirs are also very important in the Gharb region», added this professional. These resources provide a satisfactory water supply for the orchard.

Avocados were first planted in the 1950s. It was only in the early 2000s, with the establishment of the first export plantations, when the industry began to change scale and the Hass variety began to take off. □

Khadija SKALLI

Advice from Bank Al-Maghrib

Barely 2.1% growth this year

UNSURPRISINGLY, the central bank has opted for the status quo. The key interest rate remains unchanged at 3%. The decision made by the Board of the Central Bank (Bank Al-Maghrib), which met on Tuesday March 19, is based on a number of factors. In its analysis of economic trends and medium-term macroeconomic projections, the Bank speaks of the overall resilience of the global economy in 2023.

At the national level, after the slowdown in 2023, non-agricultural growth should gradually improve. It will be boosted in particular by public investment. The rate of growth in non-agricultural activities is set to rise from 2.6% in 2023 to 3% in 2024, before rising to 3.5% in 2025, driven by the expected investment momentum in connection with the various projects underway and planned. On the other hand, agricultural production continues to suffer from the effects of recurrent droughts and increasing water stress. The start of the agricultural season was marked by unfavorable

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weather conditions, with low rainfall and uneven territorial and temporal distribution, which affected the area planted with cereals. The area sown with cereals was around 2.5 million hectares, compared with nearly 3.7 million hectares a year earlier. According to Bank Al-Maghrib, cereal production stood at around 25 million

quintals, compared with 55.1 million quintals a year earlier. «Against this backdrop, agricultural value added is projected to shrink by 6.4% in 2024, before rebounding by 12.8% in 2025, assuming a return to an average cereal harvest of 55 million quintals». All in all, economic growth, estimated at nearly 3% in 2023, should be limited

to 2.1% in 2024, before accelerating to 4.3% in 2025.

As for inflation, a return to «calm» has been noted for the time being. After peaking at 10.1% in February 2023, it fell to 3.4% in December. Inflation ended 2023 at 6.1%, compared with 6.6% a year earlier. The central bank expects it to slow to 2.2% this year and 2.4% in 2025. «Its underlying component has followed a similar trajectory, falling from 6.6% in 2022 to 5.6% in 2023, and is expected to hover around 2.3% this year and in 2025», Bank Al-Maghrib's Board points out.

Another factor behind the maintenance of the status quo is the high level of uncertainty surrounding the economic outlook and the evolution of inflation, linked at the international level to geopolitical tensions and to the holding of elections in many countries. At the national level, it is above all climatic conditions and water stress that are highlighted by the Board. □

Khadija MASMOUDI

Public procurements: Observatory soon to be set up

THE last Government Council meeting of Thursday, March 14, 2024 adopted the decree concerning the creation of the Moroccan Observatory of Public Orders (Observatoire marocain de commandes publiques), recommended by the Development Model published in 2021. The Special Commission that drew up the report had confirmed the need to enhance the transparency of public orders through the regular publication of indicators and data relating to these orders. With this in mind, the decree establishes the Observatory within the Ministry of Finance.

The Observatory is chaired by the Kingdom's Treasurer General. It is therefore Nouredine Bensouda who will be at the helm.

According to the memorandum presenting the decree, the Observatory's creation will help to achieve several goals. Firstly, to collect, process, analyze and publish informa-

tion relating to public orders, while developing and updating a national database of these orders. Secondly, to encourage consultation and the exchange of information between the players involved. It will also be necessary to establish indicators to monitor the efficiency of public order execution, and to produce accounting, financial, and economic information for dissemination by all available means. Finally, the Observatory's creation will contribute to the analysis of the economic impact of public orders.

The decree defines the composition and operating procedures of this observatory. In preparing the decree, the Ministry of Finance took into account the opinion of the National Commission on Public Procurement (Commission nationale de la commande publique), which reports to the General Secretariat of the Government (Secrétariat général du gouvernement, SGG). This

was done on the basis of the decree on public procurement, revised in March 2023, on the basis of the law on delegated management, and on



The Public Procurement Observatory will be created within the Ministry of Finance. It will be chaired by the Kingdom's Treasurer General. Nouredine Bensouda will be in charge (Photo by L'Economiste)

the basis of the law on public-private partnership (PPP) contracts.

According to the first article of the decree, a Moroccan Observatory for Public Procurement will be created within the governmental authority in charge of finance. This observatory will be responsible for monitoring public procurement contracts and agreements entered into by the national government, the regional or local authorities, the state-owned entities or any other legal entity governed by public law. The decree also covers contracts for the delegated management of public facilities and PPP contracts. One of the Observatory's other missions is to approve the annual report on the results of its activities, which is prepared by the secretariat of the Observatory. It will also be necessary to ensure the publication of such report by all available means. □

Mohamed CHAOU

Weekly highlights

The Gnawa epic, from the backstreets of the medina to the world's biggest stages

TWENTY-five years ago, a group of enthusiasts led by Neila Tazi fomented an audacious cultural project that would turn the sleepy, old-fashioned town of Essaouira into one of the most important musical destinations on the continent, if not the world. Were they aware that they were preparing the start of an incredible human adventure that was going to shake up thousands of young people in a Morocco, then under new reign, that was forcing itself to assert its plurality and modernity? Probably not. The only thing that mattered at the time was the urgent need to safeguard an ancestral heritage threatened with extinction: the Gnawa artists, who are the bearers of an extraordinary culture with sub-Saharan roots, of a memorable musical knowledge, guarantors of an immutable spiritual heritage, were, in



The festival has given a new lease of life to a tradition of unparalleled richness, a precious part of Morocco's musical heritage (Photo by «Festival Gnaoua et Musiques du Monde»)

Arabism were legion. Liberating the creative, self-willed youth thirsting for art and universality that these same preachers held in check was another, far more perilous challenge. Revealing, over the years, the impact of art in the economic and social development of a region was certainly the greatest challenge. The consequences were manifold, and the popular success of the festival was immediate: tens of thousands of people flocked to Essaouira right from the start, and some remember the food shortages that arose during the first editions. The city's restaurateurs and shopkeepers were unaccustomed to seeing crowds of visitors, and from the day after the festival opened, food was in short supply, as were hotel rooms. Many people spent the nights under the stars on Essaouira beach, lulled by the trade winds and a new, invigorating sense of freedom. We've come a long way since then...

«My emotions run high when I think back on the incredible artistic and human epic we've lived through over the past 25 years. I have many vivid images in my mind, and I also think of all the extraordinarily talented men and women who have marked the history of the festival, be they artists, members of the team, journalists, sponsors, and public and private partners... But I'd also like to pay special tribute to the genius of the great Maâlems who are no longer with us:

Mohamed Sam, Abderrahman Paca, Hamida Boussou, Cherif Regragui, as well as Mahmoud and Abdellah Guinea», says Neila Tazi, the festival's founder, because the festival's prim



The festival has had the merit of encouraging the emergence of a new generation of artists, including women, for a discipline that had been exclusively male (Photo by «Festival Gnaoua et Musiques du Monde»)

achievement is to have restored all its credentials to this incredibly rich tradition, perpetuated by the descendants of slaves, and which constitutes a precious part of Morocco's musical heritage.

Today, the Maâlems collaborate with the greatest foreign musicians, and perform in the most prestigious halls and on the stages of the most important festivals in the world, from New York to Tokyo, including Sydney, Dubai, London, and Paris. But above all, the festival has become, over the years, the meeting place of all possibilities. A place where the

world's musicians allow themselves to free themselves from all constraints and dare the most audacious associations. A moment where time is suspended, to let the magic unfold. From Randy Weston to Omar Sosa, from Lucky Peterson to Jamaaladeen Tatum, many legends have come to rub shoulders with the masterful beat of Abdallah El Gour, the late Mahmoud Guinea, and Abdeslam Alikane. This openness to the world has enabled Moroccan maâlems to shine throughout the world.

In 2009, the festival team founded the Yerma Gnaoua association, to give extra prominence to the work of safeguarding and promoting the tradition. It took 4 years of titanic work to publish the first anthology of Gnawa music, bringing together all the songs, music, and texts of this age-old art. But the ultimate accolade came in December 2019 in Bogotá, when Gnawa culture was finally included on the list of Humanity's intangible cultural heritage. The festival has also helped the city of Essaouira, and Mo-

rocco as a whole, to shine throughout the world.

Today, the Gnawa have become internationally-identified archetypes that go far beyond mere folklore clichés. Their discipline is becoming increasingly structured through training. To ensure a scientific research component and further knowledge of Gnawa culture, the festival has joined forces with the «African Studies» center at the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University in the city of Benguerir, this «African Studies» center being headed by philosopher and professor Ali Benmakhlouf, to create a university chair dedicated to Gnawa culture. □

Amine BOUSHABA



Today, the Maâlems collaborate with some of the world's greatest musicians. Here, the great Randy Weston with his friend Maâlem El Gour (Photo by «Festival Gnaoua et Musiques du Monde»)

the 90s, still marginalized, reduced to performing in the street, condemned to live by begging. The first Gnawa and World Music Festival was held in June 1998. The bold initiative was not without risks. Affirming, through the richness of a popular culture, our African roots through our deep sub-Saharan roots, was in itself a challenge, at a time when the preachers of absolute