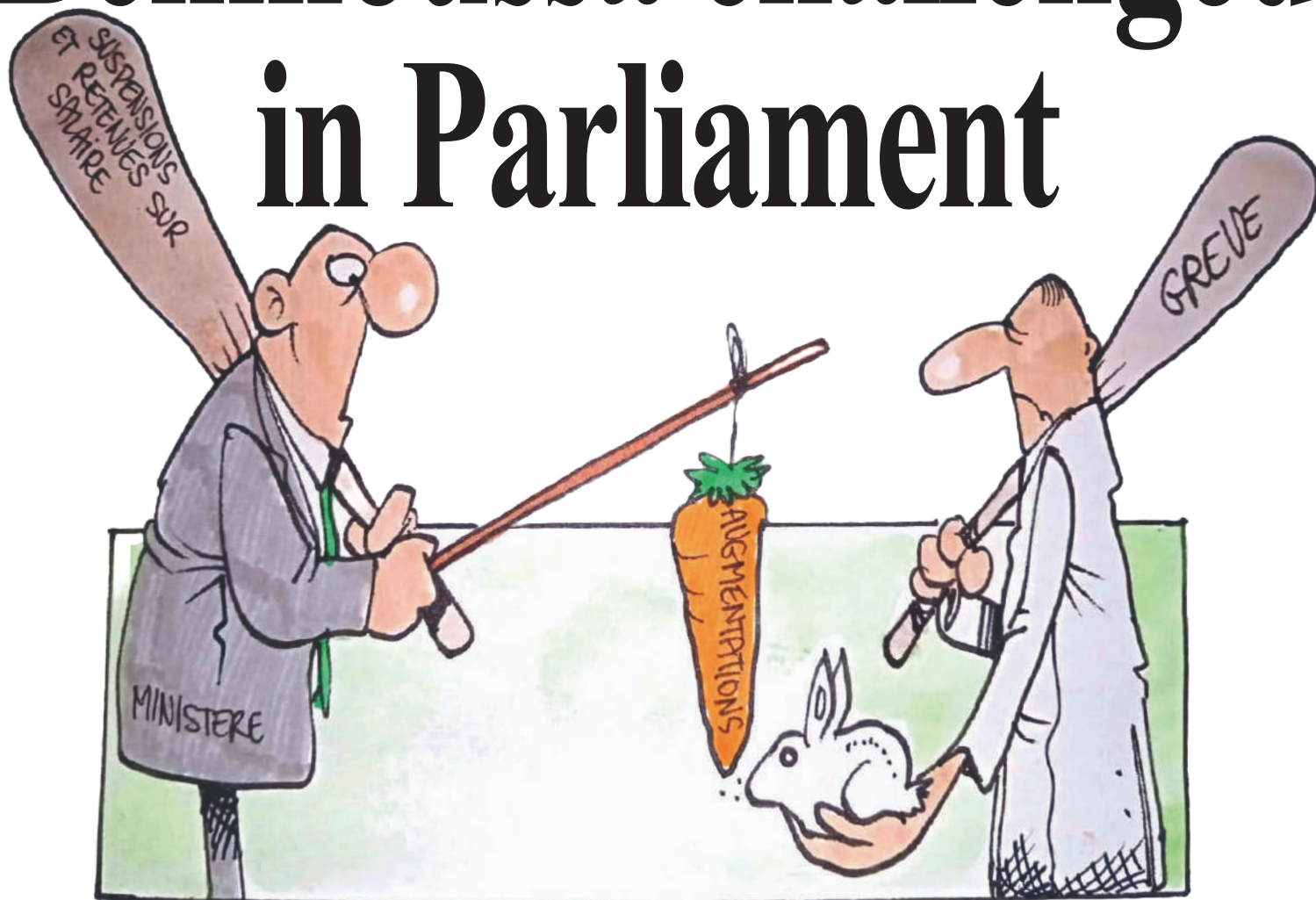


Weekly highlights by L'ECONOMISTE

Education

Benmoussa challenged in Parliament



■ **Managing school time to complete courses before exams**

■ **Respect for learning pace and school specificities**

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EDITORIAL

Appeasement

Mohamed Ali MRABI

IT is a well-known fact that, in Morocco, governing is about managing expectations and managing rain shortages. And with the recurrence of drought seasons, consolidating the development momentum requires accelerating the diversification of growth levers. In addition to strengthening the industrialization of the productive fabric, economic emergence of a country also depends on identified and widely shared major projects, such as improving the business climate, upgrading the education and training system, gearing public sector governance towards performance, and other conditions... Today, with unsteady growth, inflation that continues to threaten purchasing power, and a water shortage that will weigh heavily on development indicators, the government must double its efforts to complete these transformational reforms.

This, however, presupposes a calm social climate. The Government must learn from the current crisis in the education sector, in order to better manage

the other grievances that are beginning to emerge in other public sectors. In the private sector, the organic law on the right to strike is still overdue.

The current reform momentum must be accompanied by a revision of the model governing relations between social partners. From now on, relations built around a logic of balance of power are undergoing profound transformations.

To avoid the contagion effect of a multiplication of walkouts, and to guarantee the conditions for the successful deployment of the reforms underway, the Government is called upon to change its approach. The paradigm based on authority, which used to guide the Government's action in this field, needs to evolve towards a new form of integrative approach (including new social representations), making it possible to anticipate tensions, and to involve, and above all empower, the various stakeholders in easing such tensions. This is what will guarantee the speed of the reforms. □

Weekly highlights

Ryad Mezzour

The foundations of the new industrial strategy

THE The Ministry of Industry and Trade is currently finalizing the new industrial strategy. This roadmap is based on a series of meetings and consultations with the employers' confederation (CGEM), professional federations, regions and territories, PDRs (regional development programs), etc. This is a fundamental step in sounding out needs and collecting expectations, through the strong mobilization of all public and private partners to make Moroccan industry a catalyst for the creation of value, wealth, and lasting jobs.

As special guest of Atlantic Radio and interviewed by Rachid M'Baraki, Minister Ryad Mezzour took part in the Q&A session, providing insights and analysis on the industrial challenges facing Morocco in the future. «All regions have Regional Development Plans (PDRs). The Ministry has a database and a number of studies and analyses. The aim



is to find new points of agreement and make choices in order to set up new industrial projects», explained the Minister. «The challenge, however, is to unleash the energies of a more ambitious Morocco, to reinforce cutting-edge industrial calling ...and to explore new perimeters»,

added Ryad Mezzour. But above all, it's a question of «making the right choices, with the representatives of the 12 regions, about the ambitions and battles we're going to wage together over the next few years», insisted the Minister.

Automotive, aeronautics, electronics,

textiles-clothing, agribusiness, metallurgy, chemicals-parachemistry... All lines of business are concerned. Admittedly, some sectors are facing more difficulties than others. At the same time, it has to be said that some industries are more advanced than others, notably the automotive and aeronautics sectors, which have reached levels of maturity never seen before. But even for these dynamic sectors, it will be necessary to consolidate what has been achieved, to step up the pace and power, and to reinforce competitiveness... «The automotive sector has extremely important development prospects. We are working on projects that have the potential to transform technological capacities, export volumes and job creation», said Minister Mezzour. Today, there are new avenues of development dictated by the paradigm shift and the challenges of industrial sovereignty. □

AMIN RBOUB

L'Economiste-Sunergia survey

Housing assistance: Moderate enthusiasm for new formula

IT is one of the main mechanisms of the social development major project. The new housing assistance system was eagerly awaited, especially after the old social housing program came to an end. Today, the new system is up and running. The registration platform for the direct housing assistance program was launched on January 2. Spread over 5 years, the new scheme is expected to mobilize more than 9.5 billion Dirhams (US\$ 950 million) per year. In concrete terms, direct grants of 100,000 dirhams (US\$ 10,000) will be awarded for the purchase of a home with a selling price less than or equal to 300,000 dirhams (US\$ 30,000) including tax, and 70,000 dirhams (US\$ 7,000) for homes with a selling price between 300,000 (US\$ 30,000) and 700,000 dirhams (US\$ 70,000) including tax.

This platform enables people wishing to benefit from this support to register online and track their applications. It also facilitates data sharing between the partners involved. The program is being rolled out in partnership with the

Order of Notaries, in order to secure real estate transactions and grant direct assistance, with rates capped at 2,500 dirhams for citizens wishing to acquire a home costing less than 300,000 dirhams. Initial feedback from the

ministry in charge of the project indicates that the scheme is proving popular. This seems to confirm the results of the recent L'Economiste-Sunergia survey. Respondents were asked if they were aware that a housing assis-

tance scheme would come into force this January? The majority answered yes. Indeed, 84% of Moroccans are aware that a new housing assistance system has been introduced. Rates are virtually the same for both genders. However, per age group, it is mainly young people over 24, generally first-time buyers, who are the most informed. 91% of people aged 25-34 and 35-44 are aware of the new scheme. The same applies to 90% of 55-64 year-olds and 84% of 45-54 year-olds. Those who are not aware of the program are mainly young people aged 18 to 24, 31% of whom are unaware of its existence. Per region, the rates are fairly similar, ranging from 81% in the North and East to 86% in the Center of the country. The same applies to rural and urban areas, with 83% and 84% respectively. Per socio-professional category, D and E are the least informed. 23% of people in this category are unaware of the new housing assistance program. People in CSP C are the most aware of the existence of this scheme. □

MAM

42% do not intend to sign up



WHILE most of those surveyed are aware of the new program, only 32% intend to sign up. Of these, 23% said they would «certainly» sign up, while 9% said they would «probably» do so. Conversely, 42% «probably» won't. Of those questioned, 25% were undecided. Per gender, the rates are fairly similar. 23% of both men and women said they would «definitely» sign up for the new scheme. The differences are most apparent among those who «probably» do not intend to apply for public housing assistance. This rate is 46% for men and 37% for women. □

Education: Benmoussa challenged in Parliament

THE Minister of National Education, Chakib Benmoussa, was challenged in the House of Representatives during Monday's question time, to the extent that an MP from the USFP party, Mrs Malika Zekhnini, went so far as to ask him to tender his resignation in view of his appalling failure to manage the teachers' question. For her, «the absence of a political vision does not preclude political courage. The result is that you haven't been able to get the education sector back on track», she insisted «The fate of 7 million pupils is hanging in the balance, and the only solution left is to put the apron back on,» she asserted. The leader of the Mouvement Populaire parliamentary group was more conciliatory, confining himself to questioning the existence of a real solution to the current crisis. «But when it comes to learning and knowledge, it takes years for children to recover what they have lost», noted Driss Sentissi.

In their attempt to defend the Minister of Education, majority MPs resorted to outdated arguments, already used months ago at the start of this tug-of-



war between teachers and the line ministry. The speech by the head of the RNI parliamentary group was along the same lines. Mohamed Ghyat recalled that the crisis in education was not new, but goes back 15 years. A short while ago, he was talking about a 30-year crisis. One needs to follow through on one's ideas, said one observer. But no matter, Chakib Benmoussa remained steadfast. In his reply, the Minister ignored the opposition's rejoinders, contenting himself with his

cards and emphasizing that the sectoral dialogue had led to an improvement in teachers' material conditions. To convince the MPs, Chakib Benmoussa gave the example of a primary school teacher who starts his working life with a salary of 5,100 Dirhams (US 510) net per month. This salary will rise to 6,600 Dirhams (US 660), that is to say an increase of 30%. At the end of their career, primary school teachers earn 10,600 Dirhams (US 1060) per month. This end-of-career

salary will rise to 15,000 Dirhams (US 1,500), an increase of 41%. «These figures are provided just to give an idea of the financial effort required to ensure social peace in the sector», stressed the Minister. He recalled that going on strike is a constitutional right, but at the same time it is a matter of guaranteeing the normal running of schools, added Chakib Benmoussa. It is for this reason that the Ministry of Education has taken disciplinary measures against all those who obstruct the public education service and encroach on pupils' right to normal schooling ... And Chakib Benmoussa went on to list the verbal abuse, harassment, and attacks against teachers who have decided not to follow through with the call to strike... all these are elements which explain the measures taken by the Ministry against teachers, because, with these problems, we're in a situation where we have to take action. The Minister recalled that there are 7 million pupils in public education and 5 million families, to correct the assertions of parliamentarians who had spoken of 7 million families. □

Khadija MASMOUDI

Lawyers experience their new tax regime

THE new tax provisions applicable to lawyers, introduced by the 2023 Finance Law had prompted an outcry from thousands of lawyers across Morocco. They engaged in various forms of protest, demonstrations and sit-ins in front of parliament, blocking most of the courts, but the Government was adamant about the obligation for lawyers to pay an income tax instalment each time a case is filed (article 173-III of the General Tax Code, CGI), either as and when claims are registered (article 173-III-A), or once a year after the close of the accounting period (article 173-III-B). The amount of the deposit has been set at 100 Dirhams (US\$ 10), which lawyers are required to pay once for each case for which they have received all or part of the fees. This amount must be paid at the time of registration of a petition, appeal, entrustment or assistance before the courts. Payment is made to the clerk of the court on behalf of the tax authorities, and covers all stages of the proceedings.



It is not so much the amount of the tax advance that's important to the tax authorities as the principle, since it enables them to identify thousands of lawyers who have been practicing incognito for years. In fact, the figures for professionals registered with the various bar associations were much higher than those appearing on the tax authorities' registers. This was the conclusion reached by the tax authorities during the campaign to regularize

the various professions in 2020.

According to our information, almost all lawyers have opted to make their advance payments once a year, after the close of the financial year. For taxpayers in this situation, the final deadline for filing their income tax returns for 2023 expires on January 31 for practitioners practicing as individuals (article 173-III-B of the CGI).

For the overwhelming majority of lawyers, this will be the first time

they file a tax return under the new tax provisions. They will be required to make advance payments of 100 Dirhams (US\$ 10) multiplied by the number of cases registered during 2023, using a model form drawn up by the tax authorities. This form must include the lawyer's tax ID, identification details and the number of cases registered with the courts in his or her name. These data can be cross-checked by the tax authorities with the list of cases sent to them by the Ministry of Justice, again on a standard form. The necessary arrangements should already have been made between the two bodies in anticipation of the January 31 deadline.

Each interim payment will therefore have to be accompanied by a notification slip in accordance with the model drawn up by the DGI, containing a certain amount of information such as family name, first name, address for tax purposes, tax identification number, nature of the case, case number, court, amount and date of payment... □

HASSAN ELARIF

Weekly highlights

Automotive: Importers uncertain

THE annual growth rate of new car sales in Morocco was just 0.1% between 2022 and 2023. In detail, from January to December last year, 161,504 vehicles were sold, compared with 161,410 units in 2022. Worse still, in 2023, overall new car sales in the Kingdom were down 7.9% on 2019 achievements. Of total sales in 2023, passenger cars accounted for 145,292 units, compared with 143,186 in 2022, i.e. +1.4%. Sales of light commercial vehicles (LCVs) stood at 16,212 units in 2023, compared with 18,224 a year earlier. This represents a decrease of 11%;



Casablanca dominates the market, with 40.7% of registrations

PER city, Casablanca will lead the way in sales of private cars in 2023, with 40.7% of market share, down slightly by 2% on 2022. It is followed by Rabat, which recorded a slight increase of 1.1% to 10.7% market share, and Agadir (7.9%), which consolidated its third position ahead of Marrakech (7%). Next in line are Tangiers (5.4%), Fez (4.2%), Meknes (3.1%), Kenitra (3%), Mohammedia (2.9%), and Oujda (2.6%). □

Prices have risen by 30%.

«Vehicle prices have risen by 30% over the last three years», according to the Association of Vehicle Importers in Morocco (AIVAM).

This is due to the rising cost of raw materials, the use of new technologies and tools, and adaptation to new standards.

Sluggish demand, driven by global inflation, has made the automotive market a lackluster one in 2023. Other unfavorable economic conditions affected the January-December

period, including difficult access to credit, according to the association.

Fiscal 2024 is marked by uncertainty, due to the vagaries of logistics, the return of competition, and efforts to support gross domestic product through public demand, according to AIVAM.

Diesel engines: Morocco's favorites, with 85.8% market share

By engine type, gasoline fell by 0.8% in 2023 to 14% market share.

By contrast, diesel engines climbed 0.7% to 85.8%. Sales of alternative-powered vehicles continued to gain momentum, rising by 133% to 463 units.

Strong demand for Sport Utility Vehicles

In 2023, demand for city cars has fallen by 3.5% compared with 2022. As a result, this segment's market share fell to 36.4%. The biggest declines were recorded by mini-city cars (-19.2%), road/executive cars

(-12%) and micro-city cars (-32%).

However, SUVs recorded growth of 6.9% to 36% market share. The same was true of ludospaces/vans, with +1.3% to 15.5% market share, and compact cars (+17% to 6.7% market share). □

L.EL

Cinema: Diving into the last breaths of the Protectorate

ANraw, realistic dive into the Fez of a vanished Morocco, in the final months of the French Protectorate. This is what director Abdelhaï Laraki offers audiences in his latest film, «55», in theaters from January 11 onwards. This ambitious auteur film brings to life a key period in the Kingdom's history, and makes audiences think about the issues that are still relevant today.

The film, which lasts almost two hours and is open to all audiences, tells the story of 11-year-old Kamal, the son of a modest craftsman in the medina of Fez in the summer of 1955. Driven by a platonic love for Aicha, his 18-year-old neighbor, he gradually becomes immersed in the struggle for independence, and finds himself caught up in the fight against colonialism alongside the student resistance fighters of the Qaraouiyyine.

The film's themes include the violence suffered by colonized peoples, colonial oppression, and the overwhelming patriotism of the people of



the time. «55 raises the question of the identity of colonized and ex-colonized peoples. It shows the humiliation and pain of a people under occupation, and their dignity in the struggle for independence», confided producer Caroline Locardi Laraki.

Another theme analyzed is female empowerment and the question of women's place in the public sphere. «Through this film, I wanted to highlight the crucial role played by women in the organized struggle for independence. To achieve this, I tried

to capture on screen their determination and fervor, often overlooked in historical accounts», said the director. Finally, the film questions the key issues facing Moroccan society in the 1950s, including racism, discrimination against minorities and the quest for individual freedom.

To immerse viewers in the atmosphere of a period film, meticulous attention was paid to costume design and the choice of largely real settings, such as the Qaraouiyyine mosque and Medersa Attarine. «The film «55» required a

major human and financial investment, with no skimping on any technical or artistic aspect. Over 200 extras were selected, made up and dressed in authentic costumes», said the producer. «A team of specialized technicians was also in charge of special effects, to ensure that explosions and battles against the occupying forces were depicted realistically», added Caroline Locardi Laraki.

Delicate work was also carried out in post-production, firstly visually, by «digitally purging» the medina frame by frame of satellite dishes and other anachronistic signs. Sound-wise, too, by recreating and enriching the sound atmosphere so that it could «immerse» the viewer as authentically as possible. Casting-wise, the film doesn't disappoint the viewers either. Actors include regulars such as Nabil Atif and Mohamed Naiman, as well as up-and-coming young talents such as Oumaima Barid, who plays the role of Aicha. □

KARIMAGOUMI