

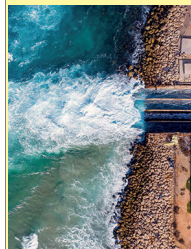
# L'ECONOMISTE

Le premier quotidien économique du Maroc

**Investigation**

## Sand plundering

# Night-time immersion in the middle of traffic



Desalination  
Map of stations



Games of chance  
Gamblers will pitch in



World Bank  
Soon an additional US\$1.8 billion for Morocco

Global prosperity  
Morocco ranks 8th in Africa

## EDITORIAL

## «Papy-boom»

Mohamed Ali MRABI

**T**HIS is one of the issues that has been dragging on for years now. And yet, it's on fire! Pension schemes are teetering on the brink of collapse. And the risk, if nothing is done, is that the funds will no longer be able to pay pensions, due to the expected depletion of their reserves, as parametric reforms have so far failed to address the root of the problem. And calls have multiplied to warn of the urgent need for systemic reform, taking into account the real challenges facing the system.

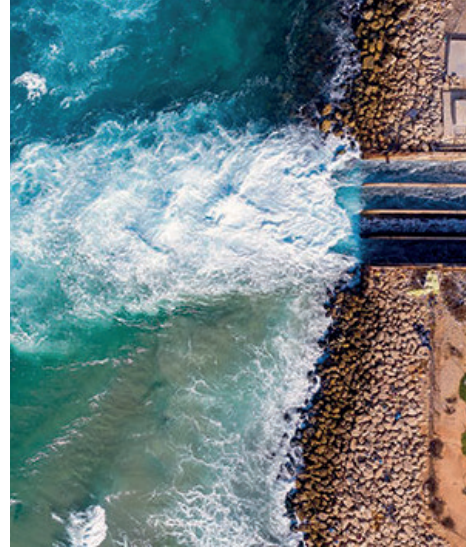
It has to be said that, for decades, sustained economic growth, driven by a booming demography, had enabled the system to function optimally, offering retirees a "replacement income" fairly close to the one received from their professional activity. Today, however, new parameters are beginning to skew

this configuration, upsetting the logic on which the system is based. These include longer life expectancy and high levels of unemployment, leading to an accentuation of dependency ratios between retired and working people. The international experience has shown that partial interventions fail to reverse this trend.

Today, with the expected «Papy-boom», following the acceleration of retirements, concerns are beginning to mount among certain categories of the population, fearing that they will be faced with empty pension funds, hence the urgent need (for the Government and social partners) to activate the long-awaited systemic reform, and above all to avoid this issue being hijacked by populist considerations and political squabbles. □

## Weekly highlights

# Desalination: Map of stations



**W**HETHER for drinking water, irrigation or industrial use, Morocco is stepping up its efforts to diversify water resources and guarantee their availability. Spread along the coastline, the 15 desalination plants currently in operation have a capacity of 192 million cubic meters per year. Six plants are currently under construction, with a capacity of 438.3 million cubic meters / year, and a further 13 are planned. In any case, capacity should reach 1.7 billion cubic meters per year by 2030, covering more than half of drinking water needs. This will also help to meet irrigation needs. Major investments will be made in

large-scale projects. This is the case for the project currently underway in Casablanca, where the largest desalination plant in Africa, and the second in the world to be powered 100% by renewable energies, is being built as part of a public-private partnership (PPP). The plant will involve an investment of nearly 6.5 billion dirhams (USD 650 million) and is a key element of the national water strategy.

Faced with declining supplies of renewable water, Morocco has opted to develop non-conventional water resources, in particular through seawater desalination. This approach integrates an industrial dimension with the use of

renewable energies to reduce the ecological footprint of desalinated water production. At the same time, the country is investing in the reuse of treated wastewater, with the aim of increasing treatment capacity to 100 million cubic meters per year by 2027.

This resource will be used primarily for watering green spaces and golf courses, before being extended to cover irrigation, industry and other strategic economic sectors.

Aware of the aggravating effects of climate change, Morocco has readjusted its water strategy. The climate variable is integrated into the National Plan for Drinking Water Supply and Irrigation

(PNAEPI 2020-2027) and into the National Water Plan. These programs aim to diversify and strengthen the supply of water resources, whether renewable or non-conventional, in order to meet 100% of drinking water needs and cover at least 80% of agricultural requirements. Complementary measures are also underway to rationalize water consumption and raise awareness of the need for more responsible management of this vital resource.

At the heart of this water vision is the reservoirs policy, adopted as a long-term pillar for preserving the country's water balance. Today, Morocco has 154 large dams with a storage capacity of 20.7 billion cubic meters, a capacity that is set to rise to 24 billion cubic meters by 2030.

At the same time, the country is stepping up inter-basin transfer projects to ensure an equitable distribution of resources. Major initiatives include connecting the Oued Laou-Larache, Loukous, Oued Sebou, Bouregreg, and Oued Oum Er-Rbia basins. These projects illustrate the country's determination to anticipate future needs while ensuring sustainable and balanced management of water resources. □

**Khadija MASMOUDI**

## Games of chance: Gamblers will pitch in

**F**ROM January 01, 2025, gamblers will have to share their winnings with the Treasury. Indeed, one of the surprise tax measures included in the 2025 Finance Bill, adopted on Wednesday, November 13 by the Finance and Economic Development Committee of the First Chamber of Parliament, concerns the taxation of gambling. This provision is symptomatic of the Government's desire to tax as many activities as possible in order to generate revenue for the Treasury and finance public policies. From January 01, 2025, it is proposed to introduce a withholding tax at a flat rate of 30% on gambling winnings (Article 73-II-G-9 of the General Tax Code, CGI). Winnings of less than 5,000 dirhams (USD 500) are exempt from income tax (Article 70 bis-2 of the CGI). The tax deduction must be made by the entities paying or intervening in the payment of said gains to individuals (Article 160 ter). Revenues must be remitted electronically to the Tax General Directorate (DGI) by the end of the month



*Preparations are currently underway with the Moroccan Government to draw up the next Country Partnership Framework (the current CPF expires at the end of 2025), ensuring that it is aligned with shared priorities. (Photo from the archives)*

following their collection by the persons concerned (Article 174-VII of the CGI). In the event of inconsistency, the tax authorities reserve the right to make any adjustments they deem necessary, and to inform the persons responsible

for withholding tax, in accordance with Article 219 of the CGI. These taxes may only be contested in accordance with the provisions of Article 235 of the CGI. Whether in cash or in kind, games of chance are taken in their broadest sense.

This includes sports betting (toto foot), horse betting, lotto, scratch cards, online betting such as Bwin, Betclac, Unibet, Winamax, casinos, and others. Also taxable according to their commercial value are raffle prizes such as cars, cell phones, etc.

Entities operating games of chance and paying or involved in the payment of winnings to individual bettors are required to file an online declaration of said winnings with the DGI by March 01 of each year. Winnings generated by online gambling are also covered by the new tax provision. The withholding tax in this case will have to be carried out by banks and other similar bodies or any other entity involved in the receipt and payment of such winnings. The taxation of games of chance in all categories, starting at 5,000 dirhams (USD 500), represents a major change for the many gamblers, some of whom are regulars. The latter will be "stripped" of 30% of their winnings for the benefit of the Treasury. □

**Hassan ELARIF**

## Sand plundering Night-time immersion in the middle of traffic



Truck tracks still visible in a coastal area in the Gharb region between mileposts PK 75 and 95 (Photo by Bziouat)

A team from L'Economiste (reporter and photographer) recently visited several sites in the Gharb region, between Kénitra and Moulay Bousselham. All along the coastal road, soil excavations and disfigurement of marine dunes are visible from afar, especially on the road leading to Moulay Bousselham, exactly at the Sidi Allal Tazi interchange (douar Ouled El Mehdi, 30 km north of Kénitra). From this stretch of motorway, not far from the interchange, dump trucks could be seen near the shoreline.

All around the vehicles, young people with shovels are filling up the skip of a truck, some 100 me-

ters from the beach. We try to move forward a little more quietly to take photos without flash, under the moonlight. Suddenly, two sand-laden trucks drive by, their lights off, heading for the freeway. Barely ten meters separate us from the overloaded vehicles.

At this point, the photographer sets off a flurry of flashbulbs to catch them in the act. For further proof, we decide to follow a truck on a track adjacent to the freeway. A few minutes later, however, the trucker stops the engine and the track in question turns out to be a dead end...

Even on Google Earth, the area is clearly visible with holes.

This field trip confirms that sand plundering is commonplace in the Gharb region, especially in the area between PK (mileposts) 75 and 95 and near the Sidi Allal Tazi interchange.

Even on Google Earth, the area in question is clearly visible, with holes, soil excavations and broken dunes... In fact, overexploitation intensifies 5 km from Sidi-Allal-Tazi and continues 10 km further to the Sidi El Hachmi El Bahraoui hamlet. Connections between the road and motorway network, as well as secondary roads 2 and 3 in the Gharb region, enable looters to disappear in just a few minutes. □

Amin RBOUB

### Traffic between midnight and 5 a.m

IN this Gharb region, looting takes place mainly at night, between midnight and 5 a.m. This timing is not fortuitous, as it occurs outside the administrative time slots of the inspection teams. Enforcement officers can only intervene between 8 a.m and 5 p.m. In the end, this leaves a wide window of opportunity of 15 hours (from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m.). Another aberration is that, in order to limit the number of trips made by authorized sand quarry trucks, the authorities grant only one exit permit per vehicle. However, it turns out that even the drivers/plunderers take this ticket, which they keep preciously for several trips/loads. "The looters take a voucher at 6 a.m. and continue looting with it all day long", testified a source on the spot. □

### ■ We're caught in a trap

AT one point, we realize we're trapped in a dead end. Within seconds, colossal diggers emerge from the quarry, shovels in hand, and surround our vehicle, shouting insults and all manner of threats. After a few tense exchanges, they understand that we are journalists. But even as they check on our condition, the tone escalates and the threats become more virulent. Muscular, scarred shovel-men try to block our path and violently bang the hood. At this point, we try to reverse and force our way back to the freeway. According to our guide, "these people are very violent. They're usually ex-convicts with nothing to lose. They're not even afraid of the gendarmes...". On this advice, we decided to leave before more looters arrived.

### ■ 8,000 Dirhams per truck/trip

IN the Kénitra area alone, the volume of sand extracted is estimated at over 27 million cubic meters, all extractions combined. In all, some one hundred trucks operate in total clandestinity and impunity, making an average of 2 to 4 trips a day. Truckers from the North make 2 trips a day, while those from the Gharb make an average of four. In terms of volume, this corresponds to the equivalent of 5,000 cubic meters per day, at a rate of 8,000 dirhams (USD 800) per trip/truck. In terms of value, sand professionals speak of a revenue and net profit of at least 600,000 dirhams (USD 60,000) /day for the entire zone. A windfall that no other traffic can achieve in such a short space of time! This is what is at stake for operators, hauliers, and other people. In principle, the loading capacity of a small solo truck is 5 cubic meters. But in reality, here truck bodies are transformed by makeshift bodybuilders and configured to load 12 cubic meters, the equivalent of 18 tons per truck. □

## Weekly highlights

### World Bank

## Soon an additional US\$1.8 billion for Morocco

FOR each member country in which it operates, the World Bank formulates a Country Partnership Framework (CPF) in collaboration with the Government. This is a strategic instrument that guides the national programs supported by the WBG, and enables their impact to be assessed. The CPF sets priorities for collaboration and the instruments used to finance them. In Morocco, CPF projects support the development challenges set out in the New Development Model. The World Bank is currently financing 27 projects in Morocco, for a total of nearly US\$8 billion.

For the current fiscal year, ending June 30, 2025, “we plan to mobilize \$1.8 billion in new financing to support the agricultural sector, municipal solid waste management, human capital development and social protection, climate resilience and disaster management, and the justice sector”, said Ahmadou Moustapha Ndiaye, the World Bank’s Country Director for the Maghreb and Malta, based in Rabat, in his exclusive interview with L’Economiste. Preparations are currently underway



Preparations are currently underway with the Moroccan Government to draw up the next Country Partnership Framework (the current CPF expires at the end of 2025), ensuring that it is aligned with shared priorities. (Photo from the archives)

with the Moroccan Government to develop the next CPF, (the current CPF expires at the end of 2025), ensuring that it is aligned with shared priorities. “I’d like to highlight one important element in this regard: the CPF process includes extensive dialogue with the Government, the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders, which is essential to ensure that this strategic

framework is aligned with the country’s development goals and with the WBG’s activities. Stakeholder engagement helps align the CPF with the country’s needs and priorities, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and impact of World Bank support”, said Ahmadou Moustapha Ndiaye.

The increased lending capacity and additional development financing will

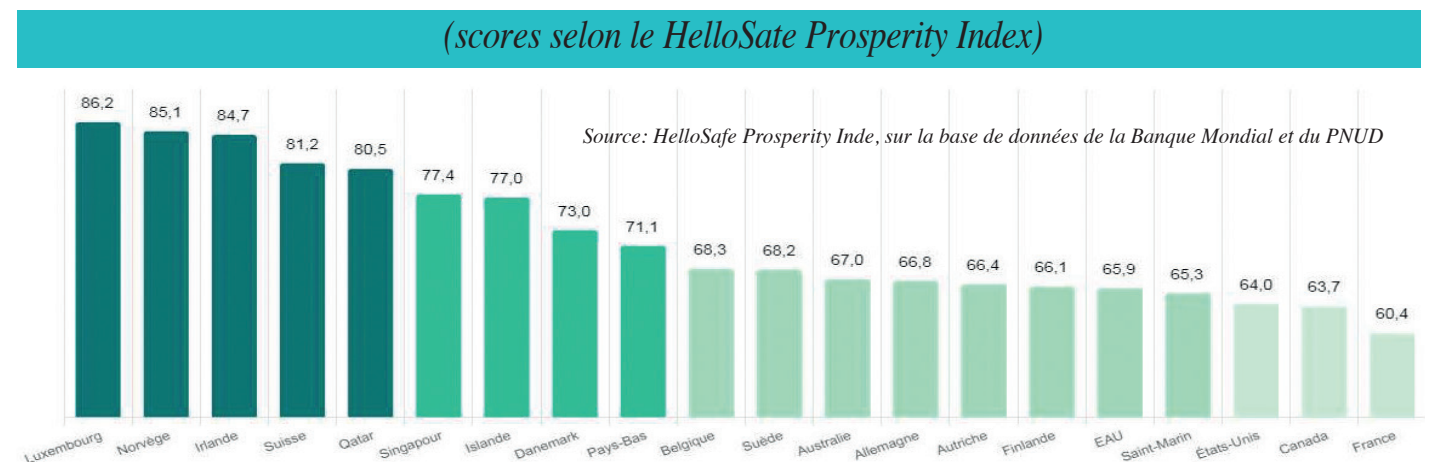
support transformative projects, enabling the institution to undertake more ambitious initiatives that promote significant economic and social progress in developing countries. “These projects will tackle major challenges such as infrastructure development, poverty reduction, and climate resilience, and will have a positive impact on communities around the world”, said the World Bank’s Country Director for the Maghreb and Malta. □

Fatim-Zahra TOHRY

## Global prosperity: Morocco ranks 8th in Africa

FOR the first time, the HelloSafe Prosperity Index 2024 unveils a new way of measuring the global well-being of nations, taking into account not only economic indicators such as GDP and GNP, but also social and environmental dimensions. The index assesses the prosperity of 186 countries, highlighting inequalities between regions. Through in-depth analysis, it enables nations from Morocco to Europe to be ranked according to economic, social, and environmental criteria, providing valuable insight into the global challenges of tomorrow.

The index is based on six key criteria: GDP per capita, gross national income (GNI) per capita, gross national savings rate, Human Development Index (HDI), Gini coefficient, and poverty rate. These indicators are weighted to provide a comprehensive and nuanced assessment of people’s well-being, beyond economic figures alone. HelloSafe Prosperity Index 2024 reveals that the world’s most prosperous countries are largely



concentrated in Europe, with Luxembourg, Norway and Ireland dominating the top three places. Luxembourg leads the way with an impressive score of 86.2, closely followed by Norway (85.1) and Ireland (84.7). These nations are characterized by stable economies, high income equality and excellent human development. While Northern and Western Europe are largely represented in the top 20, there are also some notable exceptions, such as Qatar and Singapore, in the 4th and 5th place respectively, which stand out for their dynamic economies and

modern infrastructures.

The USA (18th) and Canada (19th), two major economic powers, also feature among the high-prosperity countries, but their score is lower than that of some Northern European or Asian countries. This difference is explained by significant income inequalities.

In Africa, Morocco stands out with its relatively high score of 30.02, placing it in the 8th position in the continental ranking. This result underlines the progress made by the country in terms of economic development, improved

infrastructure and access to basic social services. Morocco’s relative prosperity can be attributed to more stable management of its natural resources and economic policies aimed at modernizing the country. Nevertheless, Morocco still faces major challenges, particularly in terms of economic inequality and poverty reduction. □

Radia LAHLOU

(1) The Gini coefficient measures the inequality of income or wealth distribution in a population, ranging from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (maximum inequality). The higher the coefficient, the greater the economic inequality.