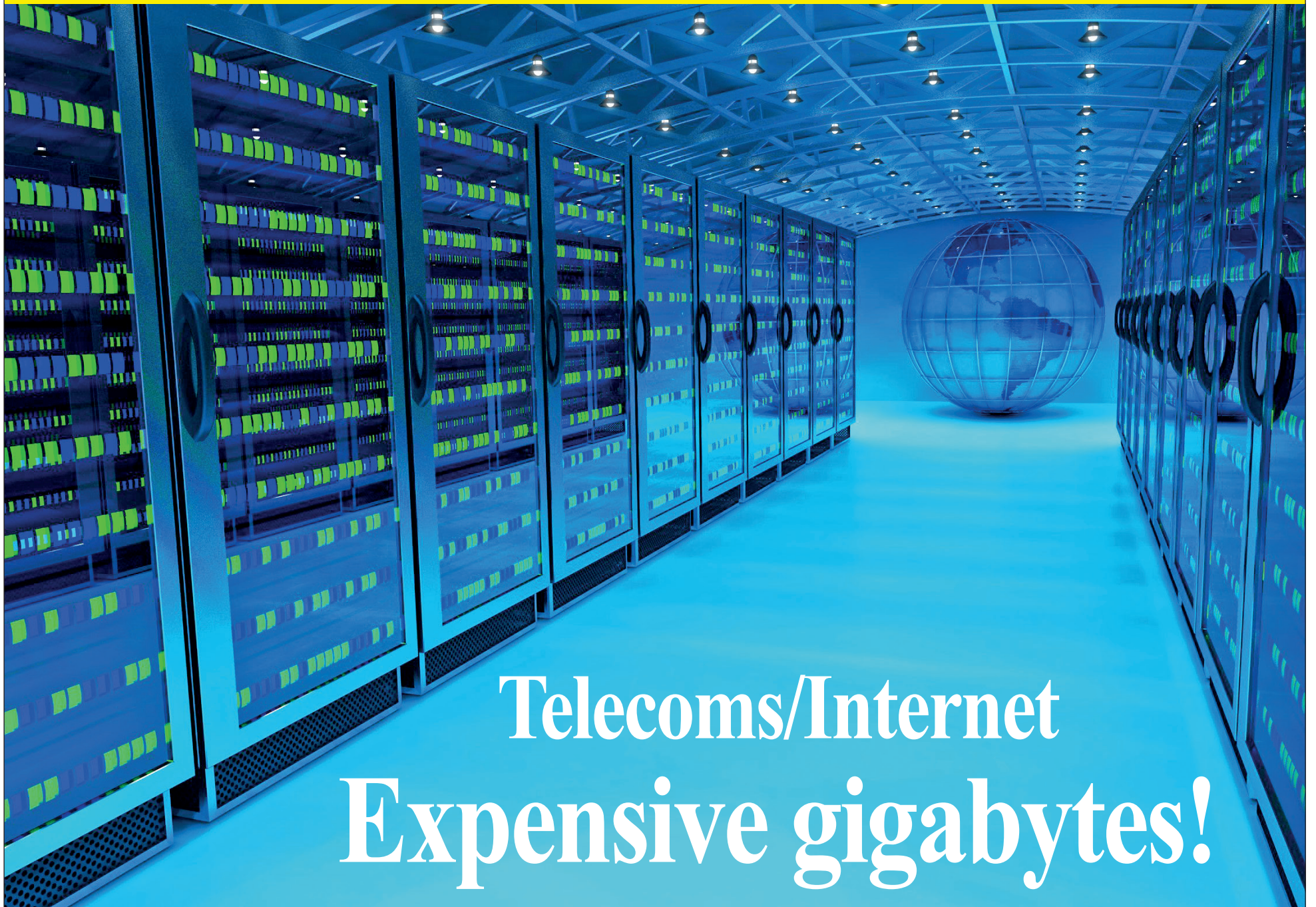


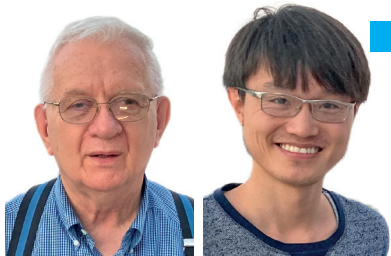
# Weekly highlights by L'ECONOMISTE



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BUREAU VERITAS MAROC



## Telecoms/Internet Expensive gigabytes!



### ■ Morocco's enduring legacy at the 2022 World Cup

By Dale F. Eickelman and Hao Ma



### ■ Casablanca: The longest urban bridge completed

### ■ Growth: Conditional recovery

### ■ Public procurements: A major turning point...

## EDITORIAL

## Cognitive dissonance

Amin RBOUB

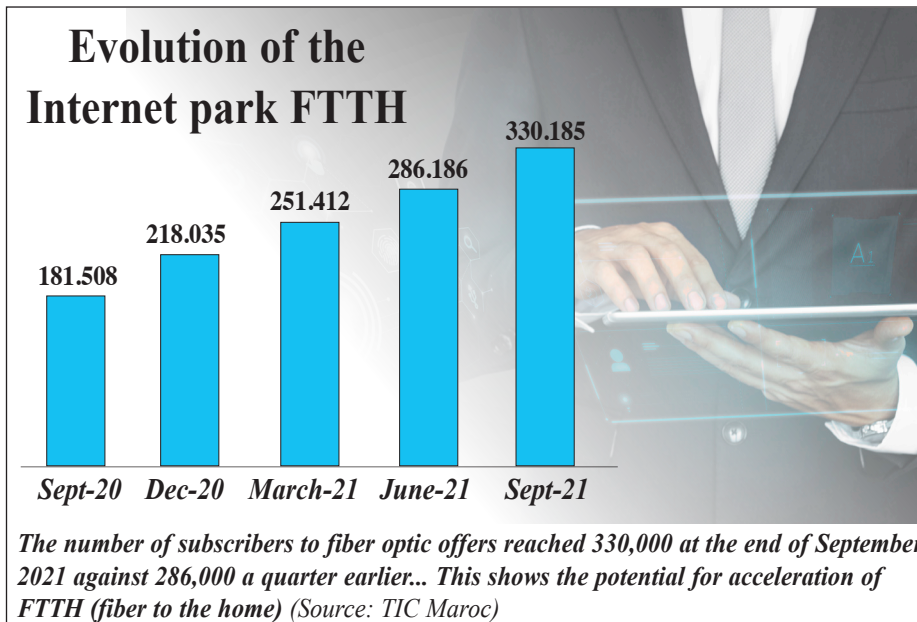
**M**OROCCO, Morocco, Al Maghrib... Never has this word been so much pronounced, evoked, and quoted by the world's population. According to Google, more than 3.5 billion people clicked this word on the search engine at least once in several languages last month. Better still, according to the Washington Post, "*Morocco is among the world's best tourist destinations in 2023*". Even before the country, located in North Africa, attracted the attention of the whole world during the World Cup, Morocco was already emerging as a very popular destination for travel, underlines the US newspaper. "*We expect Morocco to continue to be incredibly popular in 2023*", predicts James Thornton, CEO of the Intrepid Travel tour operator. Never before has the country started a new year with so many positive waves in terms of

country reputation/ brand awareness... The Kingdom has also demonstrated that it knows how to "sell its image", with credible supporting arguments. This intangible consecration is not the result of chance. It is the result of long-term work undertaken in several fields (diplomacy, sport, economy, industry, culture, communication...), but beware of the risk of the bride being too beautiful and beware of cognitive dissonance! In other words, it will be necessary to synchronise, even harmonize the image sent back in relation to daily reality. This new positioning sets the bar very high. The challenge is that this nice perception of Morocco by foreigners should be confirmed by reality. The challenge now is to work on behavior, civic-mindedness, education, values, citizenship, respect for others... It is the cement that will make this aura last the longest. □

## Weekly highlights

# Telecoms/Internet: Expensive gigabytes!

**T**HE price per gigabyte in Morocco is 10 times higher than in Europe! The average cost of Internet access is more than double that of OECD countries. In prepaid, phone carriers charge 10 Dirhams (US\$ 1) per gigabyte. However, the same gigabyte is marketed at the equivalent of 1 dirham (US\$ 0.1) in Europe. In France, for example, 90 gigabytes of Internet in unlimited calls cost 9.90 euros. *"The price of a gigabyte is so inaccessible in Morocco that it reduces connections and leads to very limited Internet use"*, analyzes Khalid Ziani, IT & Telecoms expert. The other constraint lies in the configuration of the Moroccan market with a proportion of more than 80% of consumers who opt for recharging (prepaid mode) and less than 20% of post-paid subscribers. In other words, the poorest section of the population pays more for Internet service. *"How, then, can this gap be explained knowing that Morocco does not have 80% of poor people?"*, asks the same telecoms expert. The fact that the price of a gigabyte is excessively high does not encourage large subscriptions in



post-paid mode, says Khalid Ziani. According to the expert, logic dictates that the situations should be exactly the opposite, i.e. 80% postpaid and 20% prepaid (recharge). It should be underlined that if the Moroccan market has remained blocked for a long time in this predominantly recharge-based scheme, it is because Moroccans do not have trust in the phone payment system, says the expert.

Nonetheless, telecom carriers, the telcos as they are called, have another discourse that is totally different concerning the supposed unaffordable prices for customers in recharge mode. According to the leader of a reference telecom group, *"there is more generosity towards this category of customers with special phone recharge deals (X10 airtime recharge bonus recharges, X5 recharge bonuses, and*

*other deals) practically all year round, and even more so during end-of-year celebrations, Ramadan, religious holidays, summer, and other periods of the year"*. The leader of this phone carrier adds that it is above all the low-income sections of the population who benefit from free offers via double and triple refills... But there again, there are many gray areas. *"This is totally false, this is pure window-dressing"*, retorts the expert. *"This explanation is completely biased, since the counting and calculation methods mean that the consumption of promotional refills is billed by the second and not by the minute. As a result, whatever the volume promised (by the phone carriers), the recharge coupled with a promotion is consumed faster and therefore sooner than expected"*. In addition, Khalid Ziani considers that it is *"abnormal that the prepaid offers are similar among the three phone carriers... Moreover, the laws regulating the sector do not promote greater competition concerning prepaid offers"*. □

Amin RBOUB

## Growth: Conditional recovery

**A**FTER the sluggishness of the last quarters, growth could resume during the first three months of the year. The Moroccan High Commissioner's Office for Planning (HCP) expects an increase of 3.4% in economic activity versus 0.3% in the same period in 2022, but uncertainty remains. The situation will depend on the geopolitical context and especially the weather. If there is rainfall, the agricultural value added should recover. It would increase by 6.7% according to the forecasts of the national statistics agency.

The 2022/2023 agricultural season is certainly marked by a rainfall deficit of 69% in October and November 2022. A catch-up was made with the return of rainfall in December, which resulted in an improvement in reserves; thus bringing back the agricultural season to its seasonal evolution.

Excluding agriculture, growth should increase by 3% during this first quarter of 2023. As has been the case for several years, domestic demand remains the engine of expected growth. Its contribution should reach 3.2 points versus



0.8 points a year earlier. This is partly explained by the recovery in household purchasing power, particularly in rural areas. As a result, consumer spending will pick up again: 4.5% at the end of March versus 1.1% at the same period last year. On the other hand, on the corporate side, demand should slow down, impacted by the continued tightening of monetary policy. Last December, the central bank conducted a new mone-

tary tightening by raising the key rate by 50 basis points to 2%. However, the High Commission for Planning remains optimistic since it anticipates continued growth in investment due to *"support from public spending"*. In the services sector, the non-market sectors and the trade and tourism branches will boost the added value of the tertiary sector. This value would increase by 4.6%.

As far as the secondary sector is concerned, it would suffer the impact of the combined decline in mining and construction activities as well as of the fall in foreign demand for export industries. In fact, global growth prospects depend on several factors: geopolitical developments, particularly in Ukraine, the health situation in China, the effectiveness and continuation of fiscal support, the impacts of monetary tightening on consumption and the investment, as well as the volatility of commodity markets. *"The lack of dynamism in domestic demand in the main advanced economies and the decline in new export orders in the manufacturing sector would constrain world trade, which is expected to slow in the first quarter of 2023"*, explains the HCP. Under these conditions, world demand to be met by Morocco would increase by 3% instead of 4.1% in the first quarter of 2022, and therefore the contribution of exports to national growth would slow down by 2.4 points whereas it stood at 6.9 points a quarter earlier. □

Khadija MASMOUDI

## Casablanca: The longest urban bridge completed

ONE of the longest urban bridges in Morocco will soon start its operations. This is the bridge ramp of Boulevard Mohammed VI at the intersections with Boulevards Al Qods, Driss El Harti, Dakhla and Amgala. The workers are putting the finishing touches to this colossal engineering structure, before its official launch. The circulation of vehicles on the bridge will free up the space below, in order to finalize the work on the future tram line 3 and on the surrounding roads. Longer than the cable-stayed bridge of Sidi Maârouf, this engineering structure, with a total length of 1,100 m including the entrance ramps, should make the traffic on this major axis, representing one of the main accesses to the city of Casablanca draining very dense traffic with significant flows of heavy goods vehicles. This bridge ramp will also secure the surface pedestrian paths of Casabus, Casabusway (Bw1), Casatramway (line 3) travelers, and of the other transport services for better service performance



*The engineering structure, with a total length of 1,100 meters, will have to make traffic more fluid on this major axis, representing one of the main accesses to the city of Casablanca draining very dense traffic with significant flows of heavy-duty vehicles. (Ph. L'Economiste)*

## Public procurements A major turning point...

THE decree on public procurements was the flagship project with which the Government Council ended its work for 2022. This is a real reform of the regulatory framework for the award of public contracts which takes place in a national and international context, marked by profound changes and structural transformations. The reform is part of the strengthening of public procurement governance and the consecration of the management logic, based on results and performance, in accordance with the recommendations of the new development model. The new system adopted concerns public procurements which play a driving role in economic development and the creation of wealth, says the presentation note of the draft decree relating to public procurements. The overhaul of the regulations is part of the measures taken by the government for the establishment of a participatory development model, through the involvement of all the actors concer-

ned. The idea is to ensure post-Covid economic recovery, with a view to elevating Morocco to the rank of emerging economies and strengthening its position both at the continental and international level. The overhaul of the regulations also aims to make public procurements a powerful lever for economic development, job promotion, creation of added value, and improvement of the governance of public management and the business climate. Indeed, public markets play an important and vital role in the dynamics of the national economy, in particular given the continuous growth in the volume of investments by the central Governments, local authorities, and state-owned enterprises, or public agencies. Today, public procurements obey

the same rules. It is in this sense that Fouzi Lekjaâ, sponsor of this project, stressed that the decree makes it possible to broaden and unify the framework which governs the markets to harmonize the mode of granting of the orders of the national government in the various sectors and throughout the whole territory. For 2023, the Appropriations Bill has listed 300 billion Dirhams (30 billion USD) as public investments, not to mention the 45 billion Dirhams (4.5 billion USD) under the Mohammed VI Fund for Investment. □

Mohamed CHAOUI



and for optimal passenger connections in this largest future hub of the TCSP network. Nearly 10 engineers and 200 people are mobilized under this project, which unfolds without interrupting road traffic. The Casa-Transports company is responsible for the delegated project management of this project, while the Bioui company is carrying out the work for an amount of 171.3 million Dirhams (17 million USD). In addition to the transit role provided by the bridge, the section located between Al Qods and Driss El Harti boulevards will be the largest interchange hub in the public transport network on its own site (line 3 of tramway and line 1 of BRT), and will be close to large taxi and bus stops. The tram station, in an axial position, will be set up below the structure, while that of the Bus Rapid Transit will laterally adjoin the Al Hosna mosque. In terms of passenger service, this structure will in particular ensure safe correspondence between users of the planned modes of transport and those already in existence (tramway, BRT, large taxis, and buses) by reducing the volume of vehicles using the section at the surface, and limiting vehicle/pedestrian conflicts. The goal is also to improve the commercial performance of trams and buses with a high level of service (BRTs), at intersections by guaranteeing them priority. □

Aziza EL AFFAS

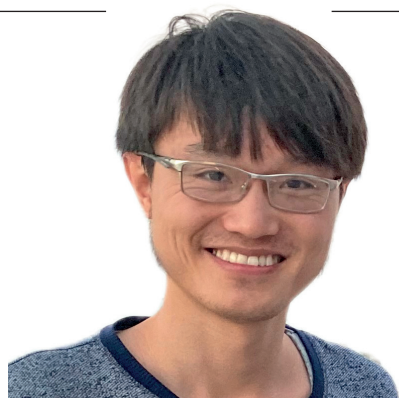
## Weekly highlights

# Morocco's enduring legacy at the 2022 World Cup

By Dale F. Eickelman and Hao Ma



Dale F. Eickelman, Research Professor of Anthropology at Dartmouth College (USA) and President of the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies (TALIM), is a frequent visitor to Qatar and Morocco.



Hao Ma, candidate at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, is preparing for field research in Morocco.



In Palestine, fans in Gaza and the West Bank celebrated Morocco's winning streak (Ph. DR)

It is hard to overstate the impact of the Moroccan soccer team's success in Doha earlier this month, notwithstanding its eventual loss to France. The World Cup was a sporting event, but it had unintended social and political implications for the Arab, African, and Muslim worlds. Sometimes sporting events offer a window on the wider world, and in this case reactions to the Moroccan team's performance gave reason for optimism.

When the whistle sounded at the end of the World Cup match between Morocco and Portugal on December 10, a Chinese chat group in which most members are Muslim was filled with the fireworks emoji. This emoji was as visible online as were the jubilant celebrations of people in the streets of Casablanca, Rabat, Fez, and other Moroccan cities. Moroccans in France, Belgium, and even the USA filled the streets and public places, singing and drumming for the victory. In Doha, Tunisians, Syrians, Qataris, and non-Arabs joined the celebrations. Even Algerian fans

posted a Moroccan flag on his social media, and the Turkish-German player Mesut Özil wrote, "Proud. What a team! What an achievement for the African continent & Muslim world." His post included emojis of hands making a prayer, the Moroccan flag, and a heart.

Soccer is a popular sport in Arab countries, but few Arab fans support teams of Arab countries other than their own. In the recent past, Egypt attracted Arab attention with its outstanding players, but Egypt did not qualify in this year's World Cup, leaving Morocco one of the few choices among Arab teams. By the Knockout stage, Morocco was the only Muslim team left, and the only one from Africa. After Morocco beat Spain, it became the only team from Africa. As many Moroccans say, "We are both Arabs and Africans." Even more, after beating Portugal, Morocco became the first Arab, African, or Muslim team ever to qualify for the semi-finals. Even Algerian fans in Algeria supported Morocco, notwithstanding the state-level cold war between the two countries.

During the World Cup, the Palestinian flag and the symbolic kefiyah were spread throughout the stadiums in Qatar. Some news agencies reported that Israeli journalists faced unwelcome reactions from fans outside the stadiums once they said where they came from. One journalist in Qatar even took Palestine as the unofficial thirty-third team of this World Cup. This is not surprising in Qatar, an active supporter of Palestine, particularly after the Aljazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was shot during her reporting from Jenin. In Palestine, fans in Gaza and the West Bank celebrated Morocco's winning streak. At the same time, in Israeli cities like Tel Aviv, Jewish fans, many of whom are Moroccan in origin, joined the celebration. So did Israeli Arabs. As a result, the Moroccan national team made a practical contribution to a coexistence that escapes many politicians and diplomats. Many observers talked about the identity of members of the Moroccan national team. Several

were not born in Morocco and held not only Moroccan citizenship but that of other countries like Spain, Canada, and the Netherlands, just to name a few. Some players were criticized as "not Moroccan enough." After this World Cup, their Moroccan identity won't be doubted. Moroccans are proud of their heroes, including those who were born in other countries but play for their parents' homeland in the stadium.

For Moroccans, their team's performance at the World Cup involved more than just soccer. Northern Moroccan cities like Tetouan and Tangier are permeated with Spanish heritage, and northern Moroccan Arabic, as well as the Amazigh (Berber) *tariffit*, mixes in a lot of Spanish words. Shared Moroccan and Spanish history and cultural styles are strongly blended, and the same is true for the urban planning legacy of the French and Spanish colonial eras. In Doha, the Moroccan Lions of the Atlas first sent the Spanish and Portuguese teams home, and in the semi-finals at Al Bayt Stadium, they did their best against the French. "An honorable defeat," was the phrase that appeared several times on a Chinese social platform, paying tribute to Morocco's achievement—which included its honorable defeat—in the FIFA World Cup 2022.

Reaction to the Moroccan team's victories, and its honorable defeat, suggests the power of diplomacy from the ground up, overcoming regional differences and cheering shared achievements. That this success occurred in Qatar, an Arab state dedicated to using its "soft" power, offers a powerfully optimistic added plus. □



Reactions to the Moroccan team's performance gave reason for optimism (Ph. AFP)