

Weekly highlights by L'ECONOMISTE

Water stress

HM the King shakes up ministers



Judicial year
Efficiency weighed down by the workload



Adjustments
to the pension scheme for self-employed workers



Tourism:
closed hotels looking for new owners

EDITORIAL

Mobilization

Meriem OUDGHIRI

IT is the topic of the and for the next few years. One of the issues considered by HM the King to be a major national concern is water.

The Sovereign chaired a working session last Tuesday, recommending that the departments concerned double their vigilance and efforts to meet the challenge of water security.

In Morocco, as elsewhere, deficits are alarming. Today, there is only one solution: to bring about a radical change in people's perceptions and attitudes towards this resource, and to initiate a new generation of strategies for all the ecosystems that revolve around it.

It is important to remember that the mid-60s marked a major turning point with the dam policy. Huge technical and financial resources were mobilized, enabling the country to withstand the most severe droughts.

But along the way, failures and «holes» began to appear, compounded by global warming. With its 66.5 kilometers of trenches, the mega-construction project of the water highway has made it possible to avert the worst, as Minister Baraka recently announced to MPs. The fact remains that this gigantic project was supposed to have been completed years ago. But it took the huge scarcity alert to get the ball rolling.

For decades, experts had been predicting that the conflict of the 21st century would certainly be over this resource. And as Loïc Fauchon, President of the World Water Council, puts it: «We have to make sure that faucets come before guns, and that cell phones leave a little room for drinking water».

Now more than ever, drinking water needs everyone's commitment and mobilization. □

Weekly highlights

Judicial year

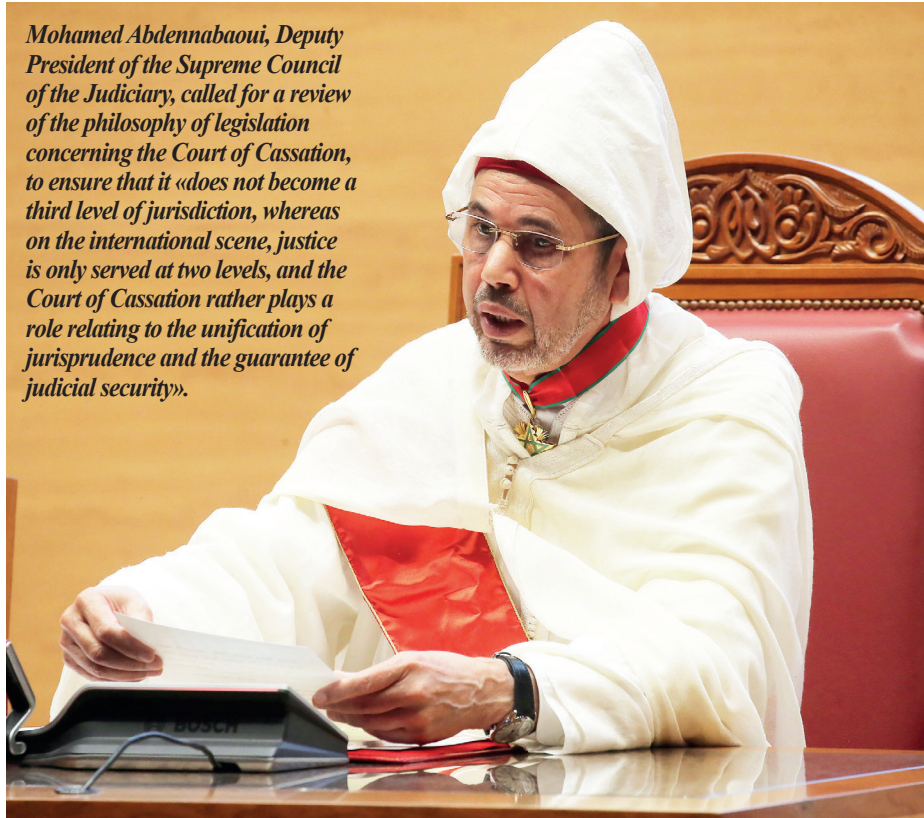
Efficiency weighed down by the workload

THE theme chosen for the new judicial year is «the seriousness of judicial action, dependent on the credibility of ethical commitment». The official opening of the new judicial year took place last Monday in Rabat. It was an opportunity for the Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary to take stock of the sector's performance, as well as the constraints that limit the efficiency of judicial action.

In detail, over the course of 2023, the courts recorded a total of 4,661,927 new cases. These come in addition to the previous year's backlog of 767,847 cases. At present, the number of cases pending before the courts stands at 5,429,774, representing an increase of 335,062 cases compared with 2022. In total, the courts have made a final decision on 4,696,203 cases, or 101% of the cases recorded in 2023.

As far as the Court of Cassation is

Mohamed Abdennabaoui, Deputy President of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary, called for a review of the philosophy of legislation concerning the Court of Cassation, to ensure that it «does not become a third level of jurisdiction, whereas on the international scene, justice is only served at two levels, and the Court of Cassation rather plays a role relating to the unification of jurisprudence and the guarantee of judicial security».



concerned, the number of judgments published on the Council's website exceeded 24,000. Last year, the highest court ruled on 46,757 cases, out of a total of 48,130 new cases registered, i.e. 97%. It should be

pointed out that 98,004 cases remained pending, taking into account the backlog from previous years. For the Deputy Chairman of the Higher Council, «this large number of cases shows the enormous effort made by magistrates, and highlights a legislative malfunction in the management of cassation referrals». In concrete terms, «the backlog exceeds the magistrates' capacity to rule. The situation is getting worse, as the number of cases registered exceeds the number of cases judged, year after year», he explained. According to Mohamed Abdennabaoui, the challenge today is to review the philosophy of legislation, so that «the Court of Cassation does not become a third level of jurisdiction, whereas internationally, justice is only served at two levels, and the Court of Cassation plays a role in unifying jurisprudence and guaranteeing judicial security». □

M.A.M.

Adjustments to the pension scheme for self-employed workers

BEING optional for the time being, the generalization of the pension scheme for self-employed workers is scheduled for 2025. To date, 1,292 memberships have been recorded. Self-employed workers have been granted a transitional period to facilitate their integration into the Compulsory Medical Insurance (AMO) scheme.

In the meantime, the pension scheme for self-employed workers will undergo some readjustments to bring it into line with those for health insurance. The piece of legislation validated by the House of Councilors on January 02 is now before the Social Sectors Committee of the House of Representatives. The draft amends articles 2, 3 and 14 of Law No. 99.15. Contributions will thus be paid on the basis of the highest flat-rate income, or the highest contribution if the person concerned is classified in more than one category, in a sub-category or in a group of categories according to the professions and activities he or she pursues.



In the pension scheme for self-employed workers, the 10% contribution is applied to a flat-rate base pegged to the minimum wage (SMIG), which depends on the worker's category. In any case, members can adjust their contribution base at will.

Entrusted to the National Social Se-

curity Fund (CNSS), the scheme for the self-employed will be based on a points system, which will take into account «the entire career «when calculating the pension. Each insured person will be entitled to an individual account in which contributions expressed in pension points will be recorded. Free payments will

also be possible. Late payment of contributions is subject to penalties. There will be a surcharge of 5% for the first month's delay and 0.5% for subsequent months. In the event of the death of the self-employed worker or the holder of an old-age pension, a survivor's pension will be granted to the spouse and dependent children aged under sixteen, or twenty-one if they are still studying, or eighteen if they are in an apprenticeship program. There is no age limit for children who are totally and absolutely unable to work due to disability. The entitlement date for widows' pensions is the first day of the month following the death of the worker or the holder of an old-age pension, on the basis of a survivors' pension application sent to the CNSS. The pension is equal to 50% of the amount of the old-age pension to which the pensioner was entitled or to which the self-employed worker would have been entitled at the date of death. □

K. M.

Water stress

HM the King shakes up ministers



During the meeting devoted to water issues, the Sovereign recommended that the departments and organizations concerned double their vigilance and efforts to meet the challenge of water security and ensure drinking water supplies throughout the country

WITH water stress, Morocco is not out of the woods yet. After his address before the Parliament at the opening of the autumn session and a meeting devoted to water issues, HM the King was back at it again with another working session on Tuesday in Rabat. Clearly, the aim is to review the progress of the various projects under the 2020-2027 National Drinking Water Supply and Irrigation Program. The same goes for the part relating to emergency measures. In any case, the figures provided by Nizar Baraka are alarming and suggest that our country is heading straight for another 6th year of drought. For the period from September to mid-January 2024, Morocco recorded a rainfall deficit of 70% compared with

the average, and a dam filling rate of 23.2% compared with 31.5% for the same period last year.

During the meeting, the Sovereign urged the departments and organizations concerned to double their vigilance and efforts to meet the challenge of water security and ensure a nationwide supply of drinking water. In managing this important project, the royal instructions could not have been clearer. The Government was instructed to establish transparent, frank and regular communication with citizens on developments in the water situation. This royal directive on communication was immediately relayed. With good reason, the Minister of Equipment and Water appeared on the TV news to explain the emergency plan presented to the

King, which includes measures to optimize the mobilization of resources at dams. Water reserves fell from 5 billion cubic meters last year to 3.7 billion. The 5 years of successive droughts have had a negative impact on dam levels. The 1.8 degree rise in temperatures over the last five months, compared with the same period last year, has also had an impact. This has led to evaporation of dam water exceeding 1.5 million cubic

meters per day. With rainfall of 32 millimeters, water inflows to dams did not exceed 660 million cubic meters, compared with over 1.5 billion cubic meters last year. As a result, Morocco recorded a major downturn. Several river basins experienced problems, particularly the Oum Rabiâ river basin, and others were affected by this difficult situation, noted Nizar Baraka. □

Mohamed CHAOUI

Roadmap

AS a reminder, several proactive measures have been taken. One of these involved connecting the Sebbou river basin to the Bouregreg river basin. This project was completed in just 9 months. Today, we can say that we have transferred 130 million cubic meters from Sebbou to Bouregreg, which now has 180 million cubic meters. In this way, we have guaranteed drinking water for a population of 12 million people living in the Rabat region, North Casablanca, and part of South Casablanca, according to the Minister. Every day, 1.3 million cubic meters of water flow into the Bouregreg dam. Today, the Ministry is trying to link its dams within the same river basin. This is the case for the Oued Al Makhazine and Dar Khroufa dams, with the aim of supplying Tangiers with 100 million cubic meters of drinking water per year. □

Need to put an end to waste

THE plan also focuses on water demand. Everyone is aware of the need to rationalize the use of this vital resource. There is a problem of efficiency, with water being lost down the drain. In any case, with the water shortage and a new year of drought on the way, the return of tanker trucks to supply drinking water to localities in need is not ruled out. The same applies to the development of watering points for livestock in affected regions. In the same vein, the walis and governors are not standing idly by. The Minister of the Interior recently sent them a circular on managing water stress and rationalizing water use. The



Minister added: «It goes without saying that the threat to public order posed by this problem, and its socio-economic repercussions, call for a personal commitment from all those responsible to achieve the desired results, enabling this vital resource to be made available to the population on a permanent basis». □

Weekly highlights

L'Economiste-Sunergia survey

Is insecurity in public places a cliché?

DO Moroccans feel safe in public places? In recent months, there has been growing criticism of the rise in crime and the increasing number of assaults. For the authorities, this is more a matter of perception, which does not reflect the reality on the ground. According to the Ministry of the Interior, daily monitoring of the fight against crime shows that the security situation is normal and under control. The law enforcement services' action plan has achieved significant results, helping to maintain the feeling of safety at high levels. This is confirmed by the results of the latest L'Economiste-Sunergia survey, which showed that 82% of Moroccans feel safe in public places. Only 15% said they felt unsafe. These data show « significant differences » from those revealed by the 2022 survey, notably with an « increase in the feeling of safety ».

In detail, unsurprisingly, men feel safer in public places than women, at 84% and 79% respectively. In fact, 18% of women feel unsafe, compared with only 13% of men. By age group, it is the 18-24 year-olds in particular who have the highest rates. 87% of them feel safe, compared with 84% of 45-54 year-olds and 83% of 55-64 year-olds. On the other hand, senior citizens aged 65 and over and young people aged 25-34 feel the most insecure, with 19% and 20% respectively. □

M.A.M.



Rural areas safer!

IN territorial terms, the majority of people living in the South (90%) said they felt safe, compared with 83% in the North-East and 74% in the Centre. The security rate is also higher in rural areas than in cities, at 90% and 77% respectively. Socio-professional categories do not seem to have an impact on feelings of security or insecurity, insofar as the rates are virtually the same, with between 81% and 82% of people claiming to feel safe in public places. □

What are the causes of insecurity?

IN the public authorities' efforts to increase the sense of safety, attention has been focused on certain aspects of crime that are of particular concern to public opinion. In the latest L'Economiste Sunergia survey, Moroccans were asked about the factors that contribute to increased insecurity in public places. The factor that came out on top was unemployment. 44% of those

questioned pointed to idleness as a source of insecurity. Other factors mentioned included drugs (34%), lack of education (29%), thieves (8%), lack of police in the streets (6%), and poverty (4%). □

Tourism: Closed hotels looking for new owners

IN a number of towns and cities, a certain number of 3-to-5 star hotels have gone out of business. They have closed because of difficulties in paying their debts to the tax authorities, the Social Security Agency (CNSS), and to other institutions. This disaster was the subject of an oral question in the House of Representatives last Monday. Clearly, faced with the closure of these hotels, the Minister of Tourism has not been idle. In fact, she is working to reopen them and get them up and running again. Fatim-Zahra Ammor began this major recovery operation in the cities of Agadir and Ouarzazate, where a high percentage of hotels

were closed, before extending it to other regions. The methodology chosen by the Minister focuses on three fundamental pillars, the first one of which concerns support to attract investors with investment expertise in this type of hotel. To this end, transfer operations have begun, through the announcement of invitations to tender or direct contact with investors. In Agadir, 13 hotels have already contacted investors. As far as Ouarzazate is concerned, 10 others have followed the same procedure. Contracts have been signed with international investors for the financial restructuring and reopening of these hotels. These investors include Pickalbatros, TUI and ABS Hospitality. The

second priority is to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Mohammed VI Investment Fund. An announcement will be made shortly on the creation of specialized tourism funds. The third priority is the new Investment Charter, which will offer attractive incentives to investors. This operation is of crucial importance, particularly in view of the international events that Morocco plans to organize over the next few years. The Minister of Tourism spoke of the measures hotels had benefited from as part of the emergency plan, including support worth 1 billion dirhams (USD 100 million). The aim was to support

hotels in restarting their activities under better conditions following the Covid-19 pandemic, which had brought the tourism sector to a standstill. The marketing of Morocco's image as a tourist destination was not forgotten. The National Moroccan Tourism Board (ONMT), which will be transformed into an agency, launched a promotional campaign under the new label «Morocco, land of lights » (in 20 countries simultaneously. «As part of this, we are also running digital promotional campaigns in the various tourist-sending markets, doing so through social media», noted the Minister. □

Mohamed CHAOUI