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XI'S VISION | HAINAN FREE TRADE PORT

## Hainan evolves as gateway to global markets

FTP hits new milestone with launch of island-wide special customs operations

By MO JINGXI and CHEN BOWEN

On April 13, 2018, when President Xi Jinping announced that China would support Hainan, a tropical island about the size of Taiwan province off China's southern coast, in exploring the creation of a free trade port with Chinese characteristics, the message traveled far beyond China's southern shores.

It reached Atyrau, a city on Kazakhstan's Caspian coast, where Ruslan Tulenov, then working at a local chemical company after spending more than a decade studying and living in China, followed the news closely.

The moment Xi's announcement was broadcast, Tulenov knew it was the right time for him to return to Hainan, where he had completed his undergraduate studies.

"I was constantly observing this country — how it developed and where it was heading," Tulenov recalled. "I wanted to find my own career chance in that process."

Speaking that day at the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of Hainan province and the Hainan Special Economic Zone, Xi highlighted Hainan's special advantages, including its status as China's biggest SEZ, its unique geographic location and the best ecological environment in the country, as reasons to make it a test ground for reform and opening-up.

The decision to build a pilot free trade zone and eventually a free trade port was, Xi stressed, a major move by the Communist Party of China Central Committee to signal China's resolution of further opening up and promoting economic globalization.

On Thursday, the Hainan FTP will officially launch island-wide

**74 percent**

of all goods will enjoy zero-tariff treatment in the Hainan FTP. Coverage of goods will expand from the existing 1,900 to about 6,600 tariff lines.

**100,000 yuan**

is the annual duty-free shopping quota per person. Tourists departing Hainan aged 18 and above are entitled to this quota with no restrictions on the number of purchases.

**1.38 million**

was the number of foreigners entering and exiting Hainan as of Dec 16, a year-on-year increase of 44.1 percent.

special customs operations — a move that Xi has described as a landmark step by China to unwaveringly expand high-standard opening-up and promote the development of an open world economy.

China's plan for the island's future also opened the door for young talent like Tulenov. When the Hainan International Economic Development Bureau, established in 2019, launched a global talent recruitment campaign, he applied right away.

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An e-commerce host guides customers through off-island duty-free online shopping in Haikou, Hainan province, on Wednesday. The Hainan Free Trade Port starts island-wide special customs operations on Thursday. MENG ZHONGDE / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Snooker sets winter pace in high-altitude Xizang

By **PALDEN NYIMA** and **DAQIONG** in Lhasa

The hushed atmosphere at the Lhasa Xinghui Yashi Billiards Club is broken only by the sharp click of cue sticks hitting the colored balls on the green tables. The qualifying rounds for the 2025 Lhasa Winter Plateau Snooker Challenge are underway, and 32 players from across the Xizang autonomous region are competing for a rare prize — a chance to test their skills against some of the world's best.

Once considered an unlikely pas-

sage on the "roof of the world," snooker — one of many games collectively known as billiards — has taken firm root in the region for reasons that go beyond mere novelty.

Weng Xiaolei, secretary-general of the Xizang Billiards & Snooker Association, said the sport's popularity is closely tied to local conditions.

Indoor sports are a natural choice in this high-altitude region, where summers are intense and winters are long, cold and harsh, Weng said.

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## Frozen wonderland



Dazzling ice sculptures illuminate the night sky as the 27th edition of the Harbin Ice and Snow World opens to the public on Wednesday. The theme park covers 1.2 million square meters and has used over 400,000 cubic meters of ice and snow to create a dreamscape that blends cultural heritage with cutting-edge technology. TIAN WEITAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

## China accelerates push for autonomous driving sector

By **MA SI**  
masi@chinadaily.com.cn

China's autonomous driving industry has entered a new phase of accelerated development, as the country approved two cars with level-3 autonomous driving capabilities, marking the first time that such vehicles have been cleared by the national regulator as authorized products nearly ready for mass adoption.

The move, regarded by industry insiders and experts as forward-looking yet cautious, is expected to significantly advance intelligent driving in the world's largest automotive market while still prioritizing safety.

The permits were awarded to models developed by automakers Changan Automobile and BAIC Motor's Arcfox, according to a statement released on Monday by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

The Changan vehicle is capable of single-lane autonomous driving at speeds of up to 50 kilometers per hour during traffic congestion. It is approved to operate on select highway and urban expressway sections in Southwest China's Chongqing, according to the ministry.

The Arcfox vehicle is capable of single-lane autonomous driving at

speeds of up to 80 km/h on designated highway and urban expressway sections in Beijing.

Next, the two vehicle models will be piloted by the automakers for use on the designated roads, the ministry added.

Sun Hang, chief engineer of the China Automotive Standardization Research Institute, said, "The approval of the first L3 models means that for the first time, China has allowed autonomous vehicles to enter the market as formal products at the policy level."

"We are exploring commercial application through pilots, which is a landmark in itself," Sun said.

In China, driving automation is defined by six levels, from 0 to 5, with L0 meaning that such vehicles are entirely operated by humans. Levels 1 and 2 are considered driver-assistance systems, in which the human driver remains perpetually responsible for monitoring the environment and must be ready to intervene instantly, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

Liu Fawang, deputy head of the ministry's Equipment Industry Development Center, said that L3, or "conditional automation", is the pivotal threshold. The vehicle itself can perform dynamic driving tasks such as steering, acceleration and

braking under specific conditions, and the driver is not required to monitor the road continuously, but only to respond when the system requests intervention.

"The shift to L3 formally enters the realm of automated driving where the responsibility for the driving task can be allocated among the driver, the car manufacturer and the system supplier. This represents a monumental shift from the unequivocal driver liability associated with L1 and L2 cars," Liu added.

Fu Bingfeng, secretary-general of the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, said, "The move means that China's autonomous vehicle sector is accelerating from the 'technical validation' phase into a new stage of 'mass production and application'."

"This progression is not merely a reflection of technological maturation, but also a vivid example of the nation's coordinated strategy to balance high-quality development with high-level safety," Fu added.

Sun, from the China Automotive Standardization Research Institute, said: "The pilot is designed to better ensure the safety of drivers and passengers. It reflects an overarching philosophy of prioritizing safety and advancing step-by-step, starting with low-risk, limited-scenario

trials before considering broader application.

"While the full integration of autonomous driving into daily life still requires time, this step clearly indicates that autonomous driving technology is one step closer to us," Sun added.

The move came after China established a comprehensive industrial system for intelligent connected vehicles, with more than 60 percent of new passenger cars now equipped with combined driver-assist functions, or L2 systems, according to the ministry.

The ministry also said the application channel for the L3 pilot remains open and will proceed in an orderly manner under the principle of "approving one model as soon as it matures".

China's progress comes amid a global race toward the commercialization of autonomous driving technologies. US companies such as Tesla Inc are also moving rapidly in this direction.

Zhang Yongwei, president of China EV100, a major Chinese auto industry think tank, said, "China and the United States are leading the way in autonomous driving technology, while Europe is also making every effort to catch up, making the competition highly intense."

## WORLD CLOSELY WATCHES AUSTRALIA'S SOCIAL MEDIA BAN FOR CHILDREN

Some safety experts praise move, others question its long-term effectiveness

By **XIN XIN** and **ALEXIS HOOI** in Sydney

The wide-ranging impact of Australia's new social media ban for children under 16 — the first of its kind in the world — is already being felt at home and abroad, especially for major platforms that have controversially allowed children full access.

The ambitious move to improve online safety governance for youngsters, which took effect on Dec 10, requires major platforms



like Instagram, Facebook, X, Snapchat, TikTok, Reddit, and YouTube to enforce the new legislation. They face fines of up to A\$49.5 million (\$32.9 million) if they take no reasonable steps to prevent underage users from holding accounts with them.

The ban follows a major survey which revealed how social media

is negatively affecting the life satisfaction of Australian high school students. The study, led by the Australian National University, looked at the impact of regular use of social media platforms on life satisfaction levels for students nationwide.

It found most participants reported regularly using at least one social media platform, while nearly one in five young people actively post or share social media content at least once a day.

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