

POLICY REVIEW

Moves adopted to implement RCEP

State Council promotes measures to facilitate trade and investment within recently signed agreement

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By rolling out a range of measures to allow greater access to the goods, services and investment sectors, the State Council has accelerated implementation of measures to facilitate trade and investment within the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

At a Dec 1 executive meeting, the State Council, China's Cabinet, stressed the importance of concluding the urgent tasks required to enable implementation of the RCEP.

It urged improved coordination between government departments and quicker domestic approval procedures to promote wider, easier access to trade in goods, services and investment, and facilitate the cross-border flow of people.

China will apply higher standards in intellectual property protection, trade remedies, e-commerce, government procurement and economic and technological cooperation, as part of arrangements outlined in the trade deal, along with the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.

The RCEP, signed by 15 countries last month, is the world's largest trade deal. It covers a market of 2.2 billion people, with participating countries accounting for about 30 percent of global GDP.

It was the second time the State Council had convened an executive meeting to outline steps to implement the RCEP, which was signed after eight years of negotiations.

"The Chinese people honor their word. We will see our promises through and the relevant government departments must accelerate work in this regard and showcase our determination to expand opening-up with concrete actions," Premier Li Keqiang told the meeting.

Li urged relevant departments to clarify rules and regulations related to the deal's implementation to honor the obligations stipulated in the agreement and ensure compliance with domestic procedures.

The council called for the acceleration of measures related to tariff concessions, simplified customs clearance procedures and technical preparations for rules on the origin, harmonization and mutual recognition of product standards.

It added that customs clearance for express delivery and perishable goods must be given within six hours.

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Premier Li Keqiang



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China will further open up services sectors in research and development, consulting and management, services related to the manufacturing sector, senior care, professional design and construction, as required by the deal, the State Council said.

The country will impose no additional restrictions on foreign investment outside its negative list of sectors that prohibits foreign investment. It will implement cross-the-board protection of intellectual property rights, the country's first such commitment in an international trade agreement, and will provide stronger protection of copyrights, trademarks, geographical indications, patents and genetic resources.

Provisions will be made regarding electronic authentication and signa-

tures, protection of online personal information, cybersecurity and the cross-border transmission of electronic information, the council said.

The government will scale up training, and promotional campaigns will target business associations and enterprises so they will better understand the new rules involved in the RCEP to help them seize opportunities and cope with the challenges brought by the higher levels of market access, it added.

Cui Fan, a professor of international trade and economics at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said the implementation of RCEP rules will expand opening-up and facilitate China's bid to foster a dual circulation develop-

ment pattern in which domestic circulation will act as the mainstay while domestic and international circulation will reinforce each other.

"What is equally important is that the RCEP can stabilize and optimize value chains in the Asia-Pacific region and improve the power of discourse between participating countries, especially developing nations, in the formulation of international trading rules," he said.

Zhang Deyong, a researcher with the National Academy of Economic Strategy at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the implementation of RCEP arrangements will provide strong impetus for the improvement of China's business environment, eradicate institutional barriers and expand the scale of market access.

"China can use the RCEP as an opportunity to expand opening-up and continue to deepen reforms. Greater opening-up will provide inexhaustible impetus for the country's economic growth," he said.

Zhang added that in the future, China must place greater emphasis on access at the institutional level, including areas such as rules, management and standards, to unleash new bonuses for the nation's business community.

POLICY RESPONSE

Pollution, disease, environmental issues addressed

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A number of central government departments, including those responsible for environment, education, tourism and agriculture, have responded recently to matters of public concern.

Countrywide plastics record system established

China has set up a nationwide reporting system to record the utilization and recycling of single-use plastics, according to a document released by the Ministry of Commerce on Nov 30.

The document was aimed at urging the business sector to reduce consumption of single-use plastics,



encourage plastic recycling and the use of recyclable and degradable substitutes.

Retailers, e-commerce platforms and takeaway food outlets are required to report their use and recycling of such products, the document said.

At the beginning of the year, the government released a plan to ban or significantly reduce the production and use of environmentally unfriendly plastic products in the next five years to contain pollution.

By 2025, China expects to effectively control plastic pollution, substantially reduce the amount of such waste in key cities' landfills and establish a complete plastics-management system, and to have made progress in the development of alternative products.

COVID-19 measures for students and teachers

The Ministry of Education has rolled out measures to prevent and control COVID-19 on campuses during the winter months and next spring because the risk of cluster infections rises at these times.



The ministry has ordered schools nationwide to make arrangements for the winter vacation and the spring semester in a timely and preemptive manner, allowing students to leave schools in batches, the notice said.

To prevent COVID-19 clusters on campuses, the ministry has ordered schools to actively take measures to prevent infections caused by cold-chain food imports.

It also stressed the importance of health education, guiding teachers, students and parents to be aware of personal protection and habits such as regularly washing hands, wearing face masks in public and adhering to regulations on social distancing.

Smart tourism construction set to be completed soon

China aims to finish building a batch of scenic areas, resorts, towns and cities featuring technology-based smart tourism by the end of the year. The move is part of an effort to promote high-quality development of the sector, according to a guideline published on Nov 30.

The guideline, issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and nine other government departments, said that by then, the country expects to see arrivals and consumption return to pre-COVID-19 levels.

By 2025, the country's tourist attractions rated 4A, the second-highest level in the five-tier standards system, or higher will be upgraded to make the provision of services more "intelligent", it said.

To achieve these goals, the guideline ordered tourist attractions and resorts to expand 5G network coverage and accelerate the application of unmanned, noncontact facilities.

It has also urged tourist destinations to make use of advanced technologies such as big data and cloud computing in order to provide

detailed information about traffic, weather and related matters in a timely manner.

Patrol team to assist with fishing ban on Yangtze

Authorities will build a team to patrol the Yangtze River Basin to assist fishery administration and ensure the implementation of the 10-year fishing ban, according to a guideline published on Nov 30.

The guideline was issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, and the Ministry of Finance.

As a result of the fishing ban, fishermen now have to find new ways of earning a living.

According to the guideline, those who are familiar with the condition of the river and have no convictions for illegal fishing will be prime contenders during the patrol team recruitment drive.

As part of a body formed to assist enforcement and administration of the ban, the team members will not qualify as law enforcement officers. However, they will be allowed to help in the collection of evidence and conduct initial enquiries under the guidance of such officials, the guideline said.

Policy Digest

Draft passed to help streamline inspections

On Dec 1, the State Council, China's Cabinet, passed the draft of a provision on government inspections at an executive meeting presided over by Premier Li Keqiang.

"Repetitive and overlapping inspections and unauthorized inspections should be strictly prohibited," Li said, noting that formalism and bureaucracy must be avoided to reduce the burden on community officials.

He said the provision would ensure that major decisions made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council are efficiently put into operation.

To regulate government inspections, the provision specified the position and responsibilities of such assessments, and stipulated procedures and support measures.

To guarantee democratic supervision, objectivity and fairness, the provision said deputies of the National People's Congress, the top legislature, members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, the top political advisory body, and government counselors, experts and scholars can be invited to take part in inspections.

Weather-modification abilities strengthened



China will strengthen its ability to modify the weather, with the aim of extending an artificial rain and snow program to cover at least 5.5 million square kilometers by 2025, according to a guideline issued on Wednesday. The guideline, published by the General Office of the State Council, said that in recent years weather-modification work has played an important role in agricultural activities, supporting disaster relief work, promoting construction of an ecological civilization — a concept designed to promote sustainable development — and guaranteeing the success of major events.

To advance the high-quality development of such work, the guideline ordered efforts to ensure that the country's weather-modification capabilities would reach an advanced level by 2035.

According to the guideline, such activities should focus on revitalizing rural regions, restoring ecosystems and minimizing losses from natural disasters.

Efforts should be strengthened to relieve droughts and prevent hailstorms in key areas during important farming seasons, and intensify dynamic monitoring to alleviate damage caused by natural disasters, it said.

The guideline added that China would improve artificial weather operations in key areas such as the Qinghai-Tibet plateau and the major environmental protection zones of the Yellow and Yangtze rivers.

An emergency response mechanism should be established so weather-modification work can be launched in a timely manner in the event of incidents such as forest fires and droughts caused by unusually high temperatures, it said.

While urging efforts to strengthen basic weather-modification capabilities, such as the use of satellites to monitor climatic conditions, the guideline underlined the importance of accelerating research and development of important technical equipment and promoting the application of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data.

China will establish a national experimental base and laboratory to improve its ability to induce or prevent rain, eliminate fog and improve air quality, it said.