Tesla rolls out advanced self-driving functions in China

AFP- US electric vehicle giant Tesla has started offering advanced self-driving functions for its cars in China, including autopilot on city streets, the company announced on Tuesday.

The announcement comes after years of attempts to overcome regulatory hurdles blocking the update in the world's largest automobile market.

Tesla said in a statement on its WeChat page on Tuesday that it would gradually roll out a software update that includes "automatic Autopilot-assisted driving on city streets", as well as a rearview mirror function that detects whether drivers are paying attention.

The functions described are similar to the "Full Self-Driving" capability it offers in the United States.

Cars with that capability are not fully autonomous, and are meant to be used under driver supervision.

The update "has already been released for some car models, and will be gradually rolled to other suitable car models", Tesla said.

China is a major market for Tesla, where the company has two factories and is trying to compete with fast-growing domestic manufacturers.

Tuesday's statement follows an announcement by Chinese automaker BYD – Tesla's biggest rival in the country – that it would introduce advanced self-driving technology for nearly all its cars.

Tesla has been working to gain approval for FSD in China, which needs to be compliant with strict data and privacy laws.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk has made several trips to China in recent years in an effort to win crucial data security clearance for the company's locally produced models.

Musk is a key figure in the administration of US President Donald Trump, who has imposed additional tariffs on products from China and has vowed to curb Chinese investments in technology and critical infrastructure.

But the Tesla CEO remains a popular figure in China.

— Self-driving boom —

China's tech companies and automakers have poured billions of dollars into self-driving technology in an effort to catch industry leaders in the United States.

While consumers are still unable to purchase fully autonomous vehicles, China has already approved multiple self-driving taxi services in major cities.

In the city of Wuhan, more than 500 driverless taxis ferry passengers across large swathes of the city as part of Chinese tech giant Baidu's Apollo Go project.

BYD's "God's Eye" autonomous driving system features remote parking and autonomous highway navigation previously found only on more expensive vehicles.

The Chinese automaker said this month that it would now make the system available even in budget models priced below $10,000.

AFP