



China News Summary

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Universal health care returns for China's citizens. China's State Council passed a plan to establish universal health care for every Chinese citizen beginning the year 2010. According to China's state news agency, Xinhua, the 'long awaited' measure will provide basic health care and medical services to 'ordinary' Chinese citizens, and include free medicines, medical services, and reforms to the way rural hospitals are run. Said Xinhua, "Growing public criticism of soaring medical fees, a lack of access to affordable medical services, poor doctor-patient relationship and low medical insurance coverage compel the government to launch the

new round of reforms." China's health care system is also facing long term changes, said the BBC. A growing urban middle class means families can afford more red meat in their diets and are eating less vegetable and rice dishes; many are forsaking the bicycle for motor scooters and can afford to take taxis. All this impacts the general health of an ordinary urban resident, who now may be getting less exercise than they did ten years ago. As a result a growing percentage of people have chronic diseases like heart attacks and strokes which could be lifestyle-related indicated the BBC. The government will be investing 850 billion *yuan* (\$123 billion) into this universal health care project and it is widely thought that this project also hopes to stimulate domestic spending in an effort to kick start a stalling Chinese economy, said the *New York Times*. Chinese citizens have one of the highest savings rates in the world, in part to save for medical emergencies, said the *International Herald Tribune* (IHT). Professor Bai Zhongen, chair of the School of Economics at Qinghua (Tsinghua) University, said that universal health care will increase consumer spending as families will no longer need to save money for health care needs, reported IHT. ("China passes new medical reform plan," Xinhua, January 21, 2009; "China plans to subsidize health care nationwide," *International Herald Tribune*, January 22, 2009; "China announces subsidies for health care," *New York Times*, January 22, 2009; "China to pour \$120 billion into health," *BBC News*, January 21, 2009)

Thirty years of US-Sino diplomatic relations. January 1 marked thirty years of the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China. In China, a two-day commemorative celebration brought together many of the key players who had been in the forefront of this historic event. President Jimmy Carter, within whose administration diplomatic relations were formalized, delivered the opening address in which he said that normalizing relations was one of the 'wisest' decisions of his administration, said the *China Daily*. Other top-level negotiators were present; from the United States, Henry A. Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Brent Scowcroft all former national security advisors, as well as former US ambassadors. China was represented by former vice premier Qian Qichen and former foreign ministers Tang Jiaxuan and Li Zhaoxing. Carter said in his opening address that Sino-US relationship "is the most important diplomatic relationship in the world today." To laughter he recalled inviting Deng Xiaoping to the United States shortly after diplomatic relationships were established, with Deng replying, "I'll be there in two weeks." It was during that 1979 visit, in a private movement with Deng that Carter and Deng talked about faith issues, "what he believed and what I believed," Carter said in a previous 2006 interview. In that interview, which was done on the occasion of the China Christian Council's Bible Exhibition in the United States, Carter said, "[Deng] ask for suggestions about Christianity. I shared three suggestions with him. First, Chinese Christians should have bibles in their hands. If China will not print bibles in China, foreigners will smuggle bibles into China. Mr. Deng Xiaoping replied to me, 'We will print bibles in China.' The second suggestion from me was that China needed to reopen its churches. People who believe in God need places to worship. Mr. Deng Xiaoping answered, 'We will reopen the churches in China. Thirdly, I suggested that China should let missionaries in. Deng Xiaoping said, 'No. Never.'" The historical role that Christianity played in aiding and abetting China's semi-colonial past remains acute to the Chinese government. In 1979 Deng Xiaoping ushered in his policy of opening to out outside world along with economic reforms. Thirty years later the US and China do \$400 billion in trade annually, said the *New York Times*. There are nearly 150 twin-city

arrangements and universities throughout the United State routinely offer Chinese as a foreign language. Ten percent of all Yale undergraduates now study Chinese as a foreign language, said the *New York Times*. ("Obama vows to boost Sino-US relations, says Carter," *China Daily*, January 13, 2009; "U.S. and China mark 30 years of diplomatic ties," *New York Times*, January 13, 2009; "Jimmy Carter and bible printing," *Regional Council of Churches, Atlanta*, www.rccatl.org/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=145)

Bird flu resurfaces, claims human lives. After being free from avian bird flu cases for nearly a year, five people have died in China from the disease in January, reported the *China Daily*. The H5N1 strain of the avian influenza was the cause of 247 deaths worldwide in 2003. Chinese authorities have been reporting the cases to the World Health Organization and to officials in the Special Administrative Regions of Hongkong and Macao. The deaths have been spread throughout China, from Shandong province in the east to Xinjiang Autonomous Region in the far west. China has the biggest poultry population in the world, and flocks all over China are being tightly watched, said the *China Daily*. A key to preventing human bird flu is maintaining stringent safety measures and monitoring of live poultry markets according to epidemiological research, said Xinhua. Local markets in China must now maintain 24 hour on-the-spot supervision of the markets and if bird flu is suspected, the appropriate emergency measure must be taken. To curb the spread of the disease urban live local poultry markets have been urged to shut down or to be disinfected every day, reported the *China Daily*. ("Alert to bird flu, poultry market tightly watched," *China Daily*, January 21, 2009; "Sixth human bird flue case reported in '09" *China Daily*, January 27, 2009; "Fresh warning on China bird flu," *BBC News*, January 21, 2009)

President Obama's inaugural speech censored. Chinese state-run media censored part of President Barak Obama's inaugural speech which was broadcast live on China Central Television (CCTV). Live footage abruptly cut away from President Obama when he mentioned facing down fascism and communism, a combination that was thought to irritate Chinese censors, said the *Los Angeles Times*. Said Obama in his inaugural speech, "Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions." 'Fascism' could be heard on Chinese state television, but cameras cut away from the simultaneous translation, back to the Beijing CCTV studio which left the anchors in Beijing and Washington DC slightly flustered as they filled in with a question about how Obama would handle the economy, said the *LA Times*. Obama's references to those who "cling to power through corruption and deceit" was also edited out of written translations that appeared on the Internet. The English-language *China Daily* carried Obama's speech in its entirety, said the BBC. ("Obama speech censored in China," *BBC News*, January 21, 2009; "Chinese media censor Obama's inaugural speech," *Los Angeles Times*, January 22, 2009)

China's economy slows, but is now the world's third largest. China has revised its estimate of how much the economy grew in 2007, making it now the third largest economy in the world, overtaking Germany, said the BBC. Although China's economy grew by nine percent in 2008, it was the first time in years it was in the single digits. At the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Premier Wen Jiabao affirmed that China is targeting an eight percent growth for 2009. "Protect Eight", as its known in China, is shorthand for the goal of achieving eight percent growth, a rate that is necessary to provide jobs for the 15 million that will enter the country job market in 2009, said the *China Daily*. Relaunching the economy, Premier Wen said, must focus on expanding domestic consumer demand. Analysts within China say that while the economy is slowing it is not collapsing. ("Growth slows but China is not collapsing," *BBC News*, January 22, 2009; "China's economic growth slows," *BBC News*, January 22, 2009; "China's economy leapfrogs Germany," *BBC News*, January 14, 2009; *Chinese youths get thrifty in gloomy economy*," *China Daily*, January 5, 2009)

Sensitive anniversaries could fuel social unrest. China encounters several significant anniversaries in 2009 (See *China News Summary*, January 2009) which could be symbolic opportunities for opponents of the government to stage public demonstrations. Just as the nation celebrates turning 60 on October 1, this year is also the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen uprising (June) and the 50th anniversary of the fleeing of the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader, to India (March). The Associated Press (AP) reported a "strike hard" campaign had been launch by the Public Security Bureau in Lhasa, capital of the Xizang (Tibet) Autonomous Region, to target robbery, prostitution, and theft. Police targeted Internet cafes, bars, and residential areas making 81 arrests. Reports indicated that the state-run *Tibetan Daily* said two of the 81 were arrested for having 'revolutionary music' on their cell phones. The Minister for Public Security, Meng Jianzhu, thinks that the "present situation of maintaining national security and social stability is grave", according to an Associated Press report. Many Chinese have accepted one-party rule as long as it delivered economic security, said AP. According to AP, Yang Fengchun of Peking

University's School of Government warned that joblessness along with the dissatisfaction of the growing divide between the rich and poor, lacking public services, and the return to the countryside of the children of migrant workers unused to rural life, could be sources of increased tension. The official estimates are 10 million job losses already, according to the Chinese publication *Liaowang (Outlook)* mostly in the manufacturing industry, but the reality could be higher. ("*China detains 81 ahead of 50th anniversary of Tibetan Uprising,*" *New York Times*, January 29, 2009; "*China faces economic pain, sensitive anniversaries,*" January 7, 2009)

Thrift is a many splendid thing: Chinese youth adopt grassroots frugality. Chinese young people in urban areas are forming Internet clubs and networks which encourage each other to come up with useful ways to save money, reported the *China Daily*. Known as the *kou kou zu* (stingy group) these young people, mostly born in the 1980s, are the generation of twenty- and thirty-somethings who have been accused of being spoiled and spendthrifts. Wang Hao, a Beijing office worker used to buy a new cell phone every six months to keep up with technology and appearance, said the *China Daily*. Now he has launched his own website to curb his living expenses to 100 *yuan* (\$14) per week, a challenge in a city where 100 *yuan* buys just two movie tickets or a cup of coffee at an airport lounge. Ms. Zhang Yan, another *kou kou zu* from Fujian province has launched a website to help people keep account of and budget their money, reported the BBC. It is also a forum for people to discuss money matters in relation to saving and cutting back. People share everything from recipe dishes to the best public bus services and remind each other to record their expenses to help track their spending. While still a grassroots movement, the *kou kou zu* eat in subsidized work cafeterias rather than outside restaurants, go to work by bicycle not taxi, shop online not in high street stores. One thrift website offers "ten mottos for financial winter", and says now is the time to avoid quitting one's job, having a baby, starting a business or buying a car, said the *China Daily*. But proponents say that far from being whimsical, the *zou zou zu* movement is both a response to the economic climate and a call to reevaluate one's values and lifestyle. It is environmentally friendly and represents a healthy and positive life attitude, said Ms. Zhang. The point is both to save money and to lead a quality life with lower costs, said a member of the "Let's have a 100-*yuan* week" on the popular Chinese social networking site, www.douban.com. ("*China's newly frugal youths,*" *BBC News*, January 7, 2009; "*Chinese youths get thrifty in gloomy economy,*" *China Daily*, January 5, 2009)

Obama's China connection: half-brother lives in Shenzhen. Mark Ndesandjo shares expatriate status with thousands of people in China, but he is the only one with a half brother who is President of the United States. Kenyan-born Ndesandjo has lived in Shenzhen since 2002 where he owns a chain of restaurants called China BBQ, said the Christian Broadcasting Network. Ndesandjo also volunteers his time at a local orphanage teaching children piano. Ndesandjo was born to the third wife of Obama, Sr. and has kept her surname. Although he and his half-brother, Barak, are fairly estranged, Ndesandjo flew to Washington D.C. for the inauguration. A few days before the event, Ndesandjo gave a piano concert in Shenzhen to raise funds for the orphanage at which he volunteers. The *TimesOnline* also reported that he had owned a web design company specializing in Chinese companies who want to reach English-speaking markets. ("*Obama's China family,*" *Christian Broadcasting Network*, January 20, 2009; "*Barak Obama's brother pushes Chinese imports on U.S.*" *Times Online*, July 27, 2008)

1,000 cheat in civil service exams. One thousand applicants were caught cheating on their civil service examinations, some with micro-devices hidden in their ears in order to get answers from outside sources, reported the *China Daily*. A growing competition for jobs mean that 750,000 persons nationwide took recent exams for 13,500 jobs, revealed the *China Daily*. Like the 1,300 year old Imperial Examinations which ceased in 1905, today's civil service examinations are highly competitive and a means by which applicants can land well-paying and secure government jobs. There were so many applications sent via the civil service website that it crashed on the first day of operation, said the *Guardian*. In one case there were 4,700 applicants for one job with the China Disabled Persons' Federation, said Reuters, but on an average there were 57 applicants for each job. Three hundred applicants were found cheating on the day of the examination, while an additional 700 were earmarked after their examination papers "shared much conformity" said the State Administration of Civil Service. Those whose answers were suspiciously similar came mostly from the north-eastern province of Liaoning and the nearby municipality of Beijing. Those who are caught cheating are disqualified from taking examinations for one to five years and have their names and identification card numbers put into a database to be referenced by the government. The Chinese government has estimated that 6.5 million new university graduates will be looking for work in 2009. ("*1,000 cheaters busted in national civil service exam,*" *China Daily*, January 19, 2009; "*Boom in exam cheats battling for*

China's top jobs," *The Guardian*, January 21, 2008; "China's civic service exam cheaters go high-tech," Reuters, January 18, 2009; "China's graduates fight for a future," *BBC News*, January 2, 2009)

City bans Internet dragnets. One city in China has put a ban on people "offering, releasing or spreading the personal information of others" via the Internet, reported the *Shanghai Daily*. Lawmakers in Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, have cracked down on what is known as 'human flesh search engines', a phenomenon whereby the public posts pictures and stories that involve the private lives of individuals. The new law, effective only in Xuzhou city, has caused controversy with critics claiming it may prevent one of the only ways that corrupt officials can be exposed. In Nanjing several housing officials were fired after photos of an official's luxury apartment were posted on the Internet, said the *Shanghai Daily*. Another official was picture with an expensive Vacheron Constantin watch while smoking cigarettes which cost \$200 a carton. Xuzhou officials acknowledged that such vigilance helped to expose corrupt officials, but said the bill helps to insure the common person's privacy. The *Shanghai Daily* cited a case where a man whose wife committed suicide was awarded 8,000 *yuan* (\$1100) in compensation for a damaged reputation after he was criticized online for having an affair. ("City bill bans 'human flesh search engines'," *Shanghai Daily*, January 21, 2009; "China city to ban web 'manhunts'," *BBC News*, January 5, 2009)

20 million migrants return home for good. Of China's 130 million migrant worker population, 20 million of them, over 15 percent, have returned permanently to their homes in the countryside, due to growing unemployment, reported Xinhua. The announcement came a day after the government issued a document which anticipates that economically 2009 will be "the toughest year" of this century, said Xinhua. *AsiaNews* reported that President Hu Jintao, who is also the chair of the Central Military Commission, has asked the army to be prepared for "military clashes" due to social unrest caused by the global, and China's, economic downturn. ("20 million jobless migrants return home," *Xinhua*, February 2, 2009; "Growth slows but China is not collapsing," *BBC News*, January 22, 2009; "China's economic growth slows," *BBC News*, January 22, 2009; "China's economy leapfrogs Germany," *BBC News*, January 14, 2009)

The Year of the Ox. January 26 marked the beginning of the Year of the Ox, one of 12 animals represented in the 12-year Chinese zodiac cycle. The cycle for recording years starts with the rat and follows with the ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep/ram, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. The significance of their sequence and how these 12 animals were chosen is the source of many legends. One of the most famous maintains that Buddha invited all animals to a gathering before he departed from earth. The only animals to attend were these 12 creatures and Buddha named a year after each of them, as a token of gratitude. Another legend pits the 12 animals in a race to cross a large river. The rat leapfrogged the backs of all the animals until it got to the ox's shoulders. It then jumped off the ox's back at the right moment and won the race, the ox came in second. Regardless of year, Chinese New Year, or Spring Festival (*chun jie*) as it's referred to in China, is a time of special foods like *nian gao* (sweet glutinous rice cake) and *jiao zi* (meat dumplings shaped like a tael of gold), special customs like adorning door frames with red couplets (*chun lian*) bearing wisdom and greetings, and above all, a time to visit family homesteads, patriarchs and matriarchs. The days leading up to Spring Festival see the world's largest annual human migration. The Chinese government estimated that 190 million travelers came and went by train during the 40-day peak travel period. The figures do not include those who used long-distance buses and airplanes. (*UM China Program*; "In China, a rush to get home for New Year," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 21, 2009)

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