

Best of Last Week: Solar storms coming, mercury in glacial meltwater, and a food supplement reduces anxiety

May 31 2021, by Bob Yirka



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It was a good week for space news as a team working with the Mars rover Curiosity released photos of [shining clouds on the Red Planet](#)—the

team noticed them starting to form a year ago and prepared the rover to capture them on film.

Special assistant to President Joe Biden, Caitlin Durkovich, noted during a talk at a weather conference that [solar storms are back, threatening life as we know it on Earth](#). She suggested that tech firms need to start making plans to deal with them. And a team led by Nicholas Scott and Jesse van de Sande, with the University of Sydney, found that [the Milky Way is not unusual](#)—compared to data from a cross-section of another galaxy.

In technology news, a combined team from MIT and the University of Massachusetts Amherst built [a dynamic robotic that could perform acrobatic behaviors](#) using a new kind of technology—an actuator-aware kino-dynamic motion planner and a landing controller. Also, Google announced the release of [a new Fuchsia OS](#) which will be used to operate its Nest Hub smart home display. And a team at Pennsylvania State University developed [a transparent electrode that boosted solar cell efficiency](#)—their cell achieved 19.8% efficiency, a record for a semitransparent cell. Also, Microsoft announced [the first product features that will be running on GPT-3](#), the natural language model from OpenAI.

In other news, a team at the Pasteur Institute found that [the Pfizer vaccine is slightly less effective against a new strain of the SARS-CoV-2 virus found in India than against the original strain but it still protects those who have been vaccinated](#). Also, an international team of researchers found that [Greenland glacial meltwaters are rich in mercury](#)—making some nearby rivers and fjords as toxic as rivers in industrial China.

And finally, if you are one of the millions of people around the world who suffer from bouts of anxiety, you may want to check out the results

of a study conducted by a team at the Weizmann Institute of Science—they found that [the natural food supplement beta-sitosterol can, in some cases, relieve anxiety.](#)

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