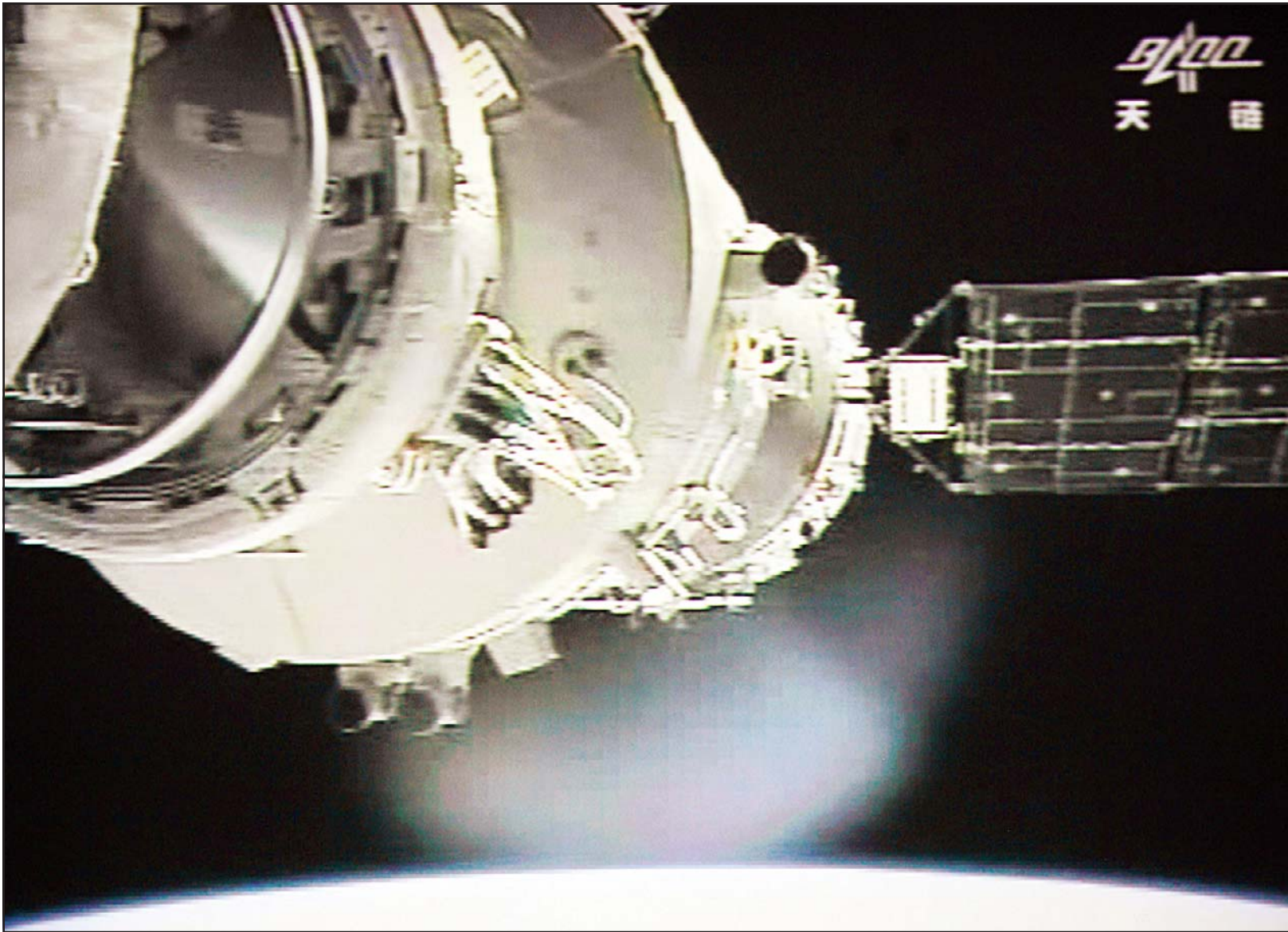


World News Roundup



This photo of the giant screen at the Jiuquan Space Centre shows the Shenzhou-9 spacecraft preparing to link with the Tiangong-1 module just over a week into a manned space mission which includes China's first female astronaut, following an automatic docking, on June 24, 2012. The Tiangong-1 Chinese space lab disintegrated under intense heat as it hurtled through Earth's atmosphere on April 2, 2018, and plunged to a watery grave in the South Pacific, Chinese officials said. (AFP)

China space lab mostly burns up on re-entry in south Pacific

China's defunct Tiangong-1 space station mostly burned up on re-entry into the atmosphere over the central South Pacific on Monday, Chinese space authorities said.

The experimental space laboratory re-entered around 8:15 am Beijing time, the China Manned Space Engineering Office said.

Scientists monitoring the craft's disintegrating orbit had forecast the craft would mostly burn up and would pose only the slightest of risks to people. Analysis from the Beijing Aerospace Control Center showed it had mostly burned up.

Brad Tucker, an astrophysicist at Australian National University, said that Tiangong-1's re-entry was "mostly successful" and that it would have been better if the space station had not

been spinning toward Earth.

"It could have been better, obviously, if it wasn't tumbling, but it landed in the Southern Pacific Ocean, and that's kind of where you hope it would land," Tucker said.

"It's been tumbling and spinning for a while, which means that when it really starts to come down it's less predictable about what happens to it," Tucker said. He likened it to an airplane landing, saying it's more difficult to predict where a plane that is "shaking around and moving" will land than one that is smoothly descending.

Launched in 2011, Tiangong-1 was China's first space station, serving as an experimental platform for bigger projects, such as the Tiangong-2 launched in September 2016 and a future

permanent Chinese space station.

Two crews of Chinese astronauts lived on the station while testing docking procedures and other operations. Its last crew departed in 2013 and contact with it was cut in 2016.

Since then, it has orbited gradually closer and closer to Earth on its own while being monitored.

Earlier forecasts had said that only about 10 percent of the bus-sized, 8.5-ton spacecraft would likely survive re-entry, mainly its heavier components such as its engines.

"The biggest takeaway from this is that as we put more things into space, all countries, we have to be aware that we do have to plan for these sorts of issues that are happening," Tucker said. (AP)

Climate

Poor will get hit hardest

2°C no longer seen as a warming guardrail

PARIS, April 2, (AFP) — Limiting global warming to two degrees Celsius will not prevent destructive and deadly climate impacts, as once hoped, dozens of experts concluded in a score of scientific studies released Monday.

A world that heats up by 2C (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) — long regarded as the temperature ceiling for a climate-safe planet — could see mass displacement due to rising seas, a drop in per capita income, regional shortages of food and fresh water, and the loss of animal and plant species at an accelerated speed.

Poor and emerging countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America will get hit hardest, according to the studies in the British Royal Society's Philosophical Transactions A.

"We are detecting large changes in climate impacts for a 2C world, and so should take steps to avoid this," said lead editor Dann Mitchell, an assistant professor at the University of Bristol.

The 197-nation Paris climate treaty, inked in 2015, vows to halt warming at "well under" 2C compared to mid-19th century levels, and "pursue efforts" to cap the rise at 1.5C.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Thursday said climate change was "the most systemic threat to humankind".

With only one degree of warming so far, Earth has seen a crescendo of droughts, heatwaves, and storms ramped up by rising seas.

Voluntary national pledges made under the Paris pact to cut CO2 emissions, if fulfilled, would yield a 3C world at best.

The treaty also requires that — by the end of the century — humanity stop adding more greenhouse gases to the atmosphere than oceans and forests can absorb, a threshold known as "net zero emissions".

"How fast we get to a 2C world" is critical, Mitchell told AFP.

"If it only takes a couple of decades, we will be in trouble because we won't have time to adapt to the climate."

Among the conclusions found in the new studies:

Researchers led by Felix Pretis, an economist at the University of Oxford, predict that two degrees of global warming will see GDP per person drop, on average, 13 percent by 2100, once costly climate change impacts are factored in.

A 2C world will also "show significant negative impact on the rates of economic growth," Pretis told AFP. Under a 1.5C scenario, he added, growth projections "are near indistinguishable from current conditions."

Under a 2C scenario, oceans rise about half a metre over the course of the 21st century, but well over a metre by 2300, another study found.



Guterres



In this photo dated March 12, 2018 a guest asks robot Robby Pepper for information at the front desk of a hotel in Peschiera del Garda, northern Italy. (AP)

Tech

'Like a real person'

Italy's robot concierge a novelty on way to better AI

PESCHIERA DEL GARDA, Italy, April 2, (AP) — Robby Pepper can answer questions in Italian, English and German. Billed as Italy's first robot concierge, the humanoid will be deployed all season at a hotel on the popular lake Garda to help relieve the desk staff of simple, repetitive questions.

During one of Robby Pepper's first shifts, Mihail Slanina, a guest from Moldova, congratulated the robot on his skills.

"He's like a real person, he's really good," she enthused. "He talks, he shook my hand."

Developed by Japan's Softbank Robotics, Robby has been taught a list of questions such as the locations of the spa, restaurants and opening hours, programmed by the Italian digital services company Jampaa. The summer tourist season will provide Robby with a crash course in unanticipated questions, not to mention accents, which will help improve his knowledge, vocabulary and ability to answer.

The use of such robots is growing in services sectors like tourism, where the scale of business can overwhelm staff with menial tasks. Most of the automatons serve mainly as novelties — humanoid versions of an Alexa or Siri meant to marvel customers. They represent an expansion in automation, but one that's likely to be scaled up only when better

artificial intelligence is developed.

The International Federation of Robotics, based in Frankfurt, Germany, forecasts sales of professional service robots will grow between 20 percent and 25 percent a year through 2020, from about 79,000 last year. That includes such diverse categories as defense robots, cleaning robots, medical robots and logistics systems robots. In 2016, 7,200 public relations robots like Softbank's Pepper, used for mobile guidance and information, were sold — a full 135 percent increase over the previous year.

"Beyond the techy novelty to engage customers, the current use of robots for customer services is completely impractical, very simply because artificial intelligence digital agents are way too stupid to be practical beyond what the time is and what the weather is," said Richard Windsor, a technology analyst based in London. Their current limitations are best illustrated by the fact that the two best artificial intelligence systems, Google Assist and the Chinese company DuerOS by the Chinese company Baidu, do not currently make such robots, he said.

Windsor predicts that such robots will fall off once their current novelty wears off, only to reappear when the technology has improved, something he sees off in the long-term.

Discovery

Bid to reconnect with sat: India's space agency said on Monday it was trying to re-establish a link with its most powerful communication satellite that went missing over the weekend, in a setback for its space ambitions.

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said the link with the satellite was lost in the third and final stage of its launch, but it did not specify the possible cause of the snag.

"Efforts are underway to establish the link with the satellite," ISRO said on its website.

The satellite was launched on Thursday through an indigenously developed launch vehicle. The GSAT-6A is an advanced mobile communications satellite with a six-metre wide antenna, the biggest used by an ISRO communication satellite. Once located, the agency should be able to command and take the satellite to its final orbit.

If not, the satellite would come down and burn out like any other, an agency official said. (RTRS)

Call for plastics-free aisles: US campaigners are calling on the nation's largest supermarket chain to introduce a plastics-free aisle, giving shoppers the option of buying products without pollution-making packaging.

An online petition has drawn some 75,000 signatures in less than a week asking Kroger Co to provide a plastics-free option in its 2,800 stores.

The petition comes less than a month after the Dutch organic chain Ekoplaza set up what it said was the

world's first such supermarket aisle, a move hailed by environmentalists.

Campaigners behind the online petition to Kroger say they were inspired by the Dutch store's launch of the aisle of some 700 products, from meats to sauces,

packaged in metal, grass paper or compostable materials.

The impetus to crack down on plastic pollution has been rapidly gaining ground, said Maurie Cohen, a professor who specializes in sustainable consumption at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. (RTRS)

Statues get anti-pollution masks:

Activists put masks on statues in Paris and other French cities on Saturday to highlight what they say is France's failure to tackle air pollution.

The protest coincided with a deadline for France to present a plan rectifying its shortcomings on air quality to the European Commission.

In a joint statement, environmental and anti-air pollution groups including France Nature Environment, ANV-COP 21, the Federation of Bicycle Users and Greenpeace, called for a clean air transport policy. (AFP)



Cohen

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