

US election coverage: hi-tech and high cost

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By the time you hold this paper in your hands, the starships of Barack Obama, John McCain and the earth's news-networks will be docking with the flag-pole on the White House.

Video votes, holograms, realtime, online interaction will have steered the cost of reporting beyond the cost of the candidates' campaigns.

"CNN plans to have campaign representatives filmed by 44 different cameras in Chicago and Arizona, then feed the data through 20 computers to result in a 360-degree image of the interviewee, there in the New York studio with Wolf Blitzer."

This from Oliver Burkeman's *Guardian* blog before the event.

Electronic media is used heavily in US elections. Votes are recorded, scanned and counted by electronic means.

In 2000, much was made of a recount by human hands in Florida.

CNN used virtual images to explain the Senate voting action in the 2006 elections.

This year a set at the Time Warner Centre in New York graphics will be used from Vizrt and Israel-based sports enhancement specialist SportVu.

Analyst says iPhone production may be cut

SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - FBR Capital Markets said on Monday that production of Apple Inc's iconic iPhone might plunge more than 40 per cent in the fourth quarter from the previous period.

"Previous checks indicated that iPhone production would fall about 10 per cent sequentially in calendar 4Q," said FBR's note by Craig Berger, "(but) our new checks indicate that iPhone production could fall more than 40 per cent sequentially in 4Q."

An Apple spokesman was not immediately available for comment.

NPD Group analyst Ross Rubin said: "To cut volume by 40 per cent would be dramatic."

FBR's Berger said his findings were a "good proxy for broader consumer demand."

Van Baker of Gartner said that if there were such a cut, it might reflect Apple's ramp-up of delivery to countries outside the United States.



CHECK-UP: Experts perform tests on a sedated Amur leopard, an endangered long-legged leopard from Russia

Critically endangered Amur leopard gets check-up

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Scientists have been analysing samples taken from the world's rarest big cat.

Researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Biology and Soils (IBS) captured a female Far Eastern leopard, nicknamed "Alyona", in Primorsky Krai, a narrow region of Russia bordered by China and North Korea, last week.

This subspecies has adapted to the cold Russian envi-

ronment with its long pelt hair, measuring up to 7cm long in winter and has longer legs than the leopards found in humid Africa or south-east Asia. The rosette pattern on its fur is more widely spaced with thicker borders.

"This project has been ongoing for just over two years, and scientific work to capture Amur tigers and Far Eastern leopards in this part of Primorsky Krai has always been distinguished by the participation of world-class specialists and use of the best equipment and methodologies," said Sergei Zubtsov, the head of Inspection Tiger, a Russian federal agency with-



The estimated population of this critically endangered species is between 25 and 40

in the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Surviving along the Sino-Russian border, it is estimated that the population of this critically endangered species is between 25 and 40, among which there are approximately 10-15 females left.

Alyona was in good healthy physical condition, between eight to ten years of age and weighing 85lbs (39kg). After taking some blood samples and an electrocardiogram, she was released unharmed.

Both of these tests will reveal to scientists genetic information about the level of inbreeding within this tiny

population and any symptoms of disease.

Previous captures of three leopards, two males and one female, in 2006 and 2007 have shown heart murmurs; a possible cause of genetic disorders from inbreeding.

Using camera-trapping and snow-tracking surveys, results indicate that over the past 30 years, population numbers have been stable, but with a high turnover rate.

Alexey Kostyria, PhD, IBS senior scientist and WCS-IBS project manager said, "We are excited by the capture, and are hopeful that ongoing analysis of biomedical information will confirm that this

individual is in good health."

"This research is critical for conservation of the Far Eastern leopard, as it will help us to determine the risks posed by inbreeding and what we can do to mitigate them."

To increase genetic diversity, scientists are considering translocating foreign leopards to try to increase the gene pool.

One successful case occurred with Florida panthers, whereby animals from Texas were merged into the population to increase the remaining numbers. Originally at a low of ten, Florida panthers now number approximately 100.

Over the last century, Amur leopards have been hunted by poachers for their pelts and medicinal qualities and had their habitat destroyed by logging, reducing food sources for those species further down the food chain.

Their prey, Sika deer, wild boar and hares are also hunted by locals. Forest produce are also a much needed source of income in south-west Primorye.

Local farmers who burn their fields to promote better growth of vegetation, often cannot control the fires, which usually spread to nearby forests, destroying their habitat.

Coating helps solar panels soak up more sun

CHICAGO (Reuters) - A new type of reflective coating can make solar panels far more efficient, soaking up nearly all available sunlight from nearly any angle, US researchers said on Monday.

Current solar panels - which convert energy from the sun into electricity - absorb only about two-thirds of available sunlight.

But surfaces treated with a coating developed at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, can harvest 96.2 per cent of sunlight.

"That is a tremendous saving," Rensselaer's Shawn-Yu Lin, whose study appears in the journal *Optics Letters*, said

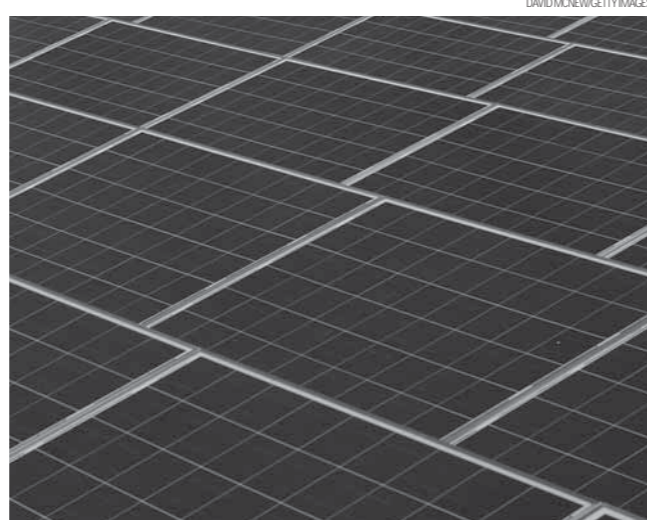
in a telephone interview.

Lin said the technology addresses two main problems in current solar cells. It captures more colours of solar spectrum and it captures light from all angles.

"If you look at a solar panel, it looks a bit bluish," Lin said. That is "telling you not all of the blue colour is being absorbed. It should look totally dark."

The other problem is that solar panels work best when sun shines directly on them. To solve this, large solar arrays mechanically shift position throughout the day - much like sunbathers on a beach.

Lin and colleagues think



A new coating may increase the efficiency of solar panels

they have found a better solution.

Their coating is made up of seven layers of porous material stacked in such a way that each enhances the antireflective properties of the layer below.

Together they act as a buffer zone, trapping light from

all angles. "Your efficiency increases by 30 percent," Lin said.

He thinks the material could be applied to all types of solar cells.

"It's not going to require many added instruments to adopt this technology," he said.

Facebook users reach 120 million, reaches one-third of UK population

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Facebook continued to surge and extend its lead over other social networks as its number of users reached 120 million on Monday.

According to Alexa, the site is now the fifth-most trafficked site in the world and the top social networking site, and is also the top photo sharing web application on the Internet. Facebook also claims it is used by 85 per cent of all four-year college students.

Facebook COO Sandy Sandberg announced the latest numbers while speaking at Salesforce.com's

Dreamforce conference in San Francisco.

The company is exploring a tie-up with the premier CRM vendor Salesforce.com.

At the Dreamforce conference, Salesforce.com announced Force.com, its new platform for cloud computing.

Force.com will allow application developers to write software that are partly hosted on both Salesforce.com and Amazon's new cloud computing platform.

Force.com for Facebook allows developers and end users to integrate the estimated 250,000 Facebook applications with Salesforce.com's business applications.

If the numbers are right,



Facebook has now eclipsed the BBC website, becoming the most popular website in the UK

Facebook's online users have grown by 30 million in the last four months, up from 90 million users in early July 2008. That means that Facebook is growing much faster than the 250,000 new users per day that the company previously estimated.

Additionally, Internet monitoring site comScore released a new report showing that Facebook had eclipsed the BBC to become the UK's most popular website.

comScore's estimate of 18 million British Facebook users means that the website currently reaches a third of the entire UK population, whereas in the US it is only 14 per cent.

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