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Exascale Computing (Supercomputers): An Overview of Challenges and Benefits

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Abstract: Exascale computing is the term given to the next 50-100 fold increase in speed over the fastest supercomputers in use today. This super powerful machine is poised to transform modeling and simulation in science and engineering. It is hoped that the exascale machines will solve some or all of the major problems that are facing us today. This paper provides a brief introduction to exasclae computing where implementation and applications of such a system will be discussed to point out the venture challenges and tremendous benefits of function execution precision, fast data compiling and many other improving system qualities.

INTRODUCTION

Computing technology greatly affects almost every aspect of our life including education, transportation, communication, entertainment, economy, medicine, engineering and science. The fastest supercomputers in the world today solve problems at the petascale, i.e., a quadrillion calculations each second. The next milestone in computing performance is the exascale. Exascale computing process refers to supercomputers that are capable of at least one a quintillion calculations per second or 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 operations per second. It is considered to be a significant achievement in computer engineering as a promising technology to satisfy all demands and challenges[1, 2].

Exascale computers represent powerful and scientific instruments and that amount of power would be phenomenal for a single computer machine. In addition to high speed, supercomputers need to have the capability to store and read massive quantities of data at high speeds. Exascale computer will require disruptive changes to optimize hardware and software[3,4].

Various initiatives have been taken by the governments (US, EU, China, Japan, Taiwan, India, etc.) and industries (IBM, Intel, etc.) to build an exascale computer. Both the United States and China are competing to become the first nation to create exascale computer. It is estimated that each of these exotic computer machines will cost anywhere between $400 million and $600 million. The first US exascale system has been named Aurora 2021 (A21).

Exascale computing basics: The speed of computers has traditionally been measured by the maximum number of floating point operations that can be performed in a second (FLOPS). An exascale system is a supercomputer that can solve problems 50X faster than on the 20PF systems (Titan, Sequoia) of today or 100X faster than on Mira. High-performance computing is currently moving from the petaflops scale (10^15 FLOPS) towards exascale (10^18 FLOPS) computing. Exascale computing systems are 1,000 times faster than existing petaflop machines. The main architectural elements of the exascale supercomputers include the following[5].

Processor: Exascale systems are built using hybrid or heterogeneous platforms. The hybrid systems use both Central Processing Units (CPU) and Graphics Processing Units (GPU) to efficiently leverage the performances.

Memory: Meeting the performance requirement of exascale computing requires an increase in memory bandwidth. This in turns increases the power consumption. The DRAM capacity of a system is basically limited by cost.

Algorithms: The advances in the architecture of supercomputers emphasize the need for changing and advancing the programming systems approach. That is, exascale supercomputing systems need to run more efficiently in terms of scalability, reliability and data movement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Applications: Exascale computing systems that enable classical simulation and modeling applications to tackle complex problems that are currently out of reach. Such supercomputing systems will meet the computing requirements of cutting-edge engineering work and scientific discovery. They will enable new types of applications such as machine learning, deep learning and big data analytics. They will also have many applications in the research laboratories and industries.

Exascale computing will push the frontiers in a transformative fashion. It is expected to be applied in various computation-intensive research areas such as engineering, biology, materials science, cosmology, precision medicine for cancer, astrophysics, energy, climate science, renewable energy, biology, socioeconomic modeling, molecular modeling, astrophysical recreation and national security.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Benefits: Exascale computers will simulate the processes involved in precision medicine, regional climate, additive manufacturing, nuclear physics, national security and relationships behind many of the fundamental forces of the universe. They will potentially benefit society in several ways. In addition to providing solutions to advances in healthcare, biology and storm prediction, other benefits include[6]:

Reducing pollution: Exascale computing can reduce pollution caused by burning fossil fuels. It will be likely to promote the efficiency of combustion systems in engines.

Advances in healthcare: Exascale computing will accelerate and advance cancer research by helping scientists understand the molecular basis of key protein interactions. It will also allow doctors to predict and forecast the right treatments for the patient by modeling drug responses.

Predicting severe weather: Weather forecast models will be able to predict more accurately and quickly the timing and path of severe weather events such as hurricanes.

Improving quality of life: The use of exascale computing in urban science promises to mitigate health hazards, lower crime rate and improve the quality of life in cities by optimizing infrastructure (such as transportation, energy, housing, healthcare) access and usage choices.

Advances in materials science: Creating new technologies requires that we discover new materials with specific properties. Exascale machines can help researchers and companies to identify new useful materials very fast. They will help design, control and manufacture advanced materials.

Extascale-scale computing will enable the solution of massively more accurate predictive models and the analysis of vast quantities of data. It will have a broad and positive impact on US industrial competitiveness.

Challenges: Going to the exascale is a challenging venture. These severe challenges arise both in the hardware domain and in the software[7-10]:

Hardware challenges: The architectural challenges for reaching exascale are dominated by power, memory, interconnection networks and resilience. Exascale machines will require radical changes in hardware and in programming applications to effectively use tens of millions of cores. Hardware challenges include increased parallelism, reliability, energy consumption and memory, network and storage efficiencies.

Power challenge: To achieve an exascale system using current technology, more than $2.5 B, power cost, per year is required to operate the system annually. Achieving this new power goal for exascale systems creates serious research challenges. The cost of power can limit the scale of computers that can be deployed.

Memory challenge: The ratio of memory to processor is very critical in determining the size of the problem to be solved. External storage is far larger but also operates at tremendously slow rates relative to processor speeds. There are indications that memory will become the rate-limiting factor along the path to exascale.

Resiliency challenge: Resiliency will be one of the toughest challenges in exascale systems. This deals with the ability of a system to continue operation in the presence of faults. It is expected that exascale systems will experience various kind of faults daily.

Programming challenge: This requires creating new programming environments that prompt massive parallelism, data locality and resilience. Exascale systems will present programmers with tough challenges. These challenges must be addressed by the researcher in order to deliver capable exascale computing.

CONCLUSION

Exascale computing is characterized by an infrastructure to support computational capability in the order of an ExaFLOP. Researchers on exascale supercomputers are already looking ahead to the next big 1,000x performance: zettascale computing which a system capable of 10^21 double-precision 64 bit floating-point operations per second. They have great opportunities to influence the course of future architectures so that they meet DOE mission needs. The latest news and information on exascale computing can be found on the website of the Exascale Computing Project (ECP): https://www.exascaleproject.org/

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