

# Karzai is declared poll victor

Run-off scrapped as West seeks power-sharing deal

Jeremy Page, Jerome Starkey Kabul

Almost ten weeks of political paralysis in Afghanistan was brought to a close yesterday when a presidential election run-off was cancelled and President Karzai was declared the winner following the withdrawal of his only rival.

Western leaders rushed to endorse the Independent Election Commission's decision and congratulate Mr Karzai, desperate to end a crisis which has undermined their efforts to defeat the Taliban and build democracy in Afghanistan.

Dr Abdullah Abdullah, who pulled out of the race on Sunday in protest at Mr Karzai's failure to tackle electoral fraud, also appeared tacitly to accept the decision after coming under intense pressure from the international community.

But questions remained over the legality of the result which gives Mr Karzai another five-year term in office. The Afghan leader is expected to make a victory speech today and will be inaugurated before world dignitaries later this month.

But his reelection lacks credibility because he did not win the necessary outright majority in the first round on

August 20, after which a UN-backed investigation disqualified a million of his votes because of fraud.

Western officials were also still trying to broker a power-sharing deal between Mr Karzai and Dr Abdullah to prevent a potentially dangerous split between the Tajik-dominated north and the predominantly Pashtun south.

"The point is Karzai's mandate is very, very, tenuous," Nick Horne, a

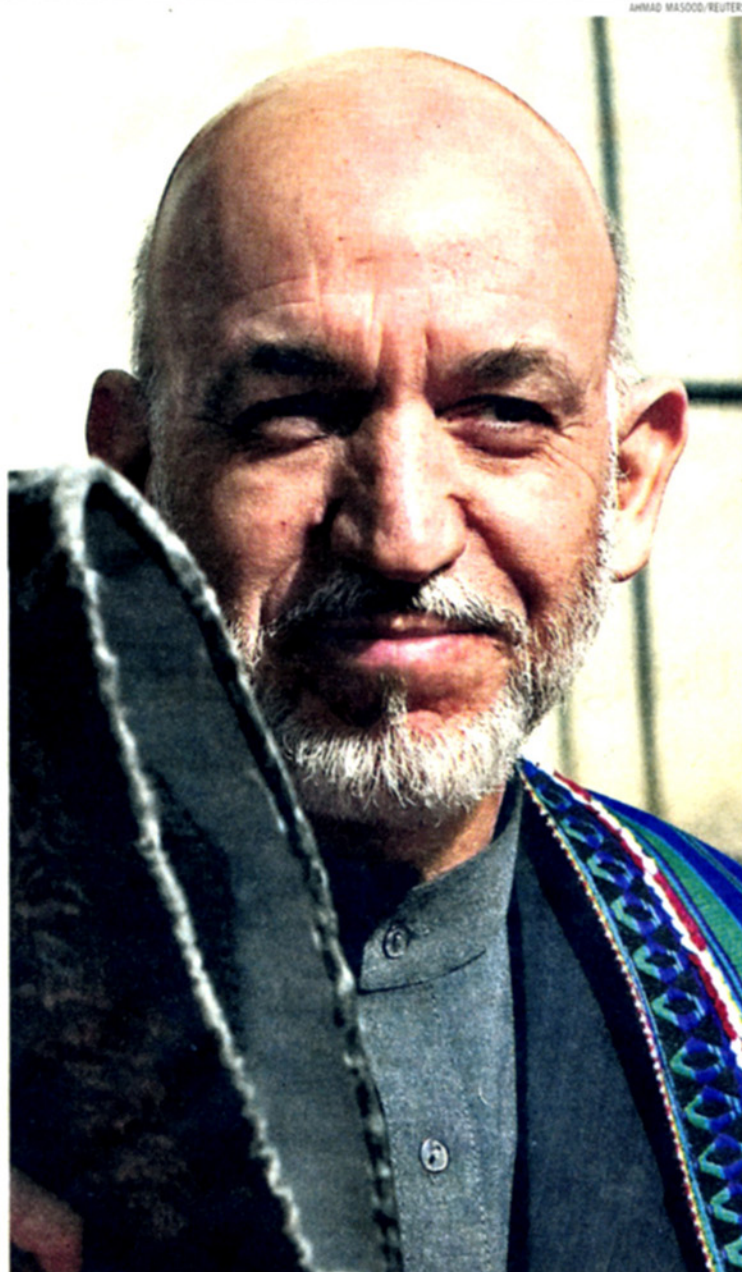
**Karzai must now deliver real reform**

Leading article, page 2

former UN political officer in Afghanistan who worked on the elections, told *The Times*.

The IEC, whose top officials were appointed by Mr Karzai, said it made the decision because of the cost and risk of organising Saturday's run-off, and because a one-horse race would compromise the President's legitimacy.

"The Independent Election Commission declares the esteemed Hamid Karzai  
Continued on page 4



A contented Hamid Karzai after Afghanistan's election commission declared him President for a second term yesterday

## IN THE NEWS

### BP secures deal over Iraq's biggest oilfield

British oil giant BP is taking control of Iraq's biggest oilfield in the first major energy deal since the US-led invasion, putting the country on a path to rival Saudi Arabia within a decade. Iraqi lawmakers have condemned the deal as "illegal". **Page 8**

### Karadzic's 'one regret'

Radovan Karadzic's only regret at the 1995 Srebrenica massacre of 8,000 Muslim men and boys was that some got away, a prosecutor told the Bosnian Serb's war crimes trial in The Hague. **Page 12**

### Pakistan bomb kills 34

At least 34 people were killed in a suicide bomb attack close to the Pakistani army's headquarters in Rawalpindi. It was the second attack in the high security zone within a month. **Page 6**

### Fears for pirate couple

Fears rose yesterday for a British couple kidnapped by Somali pirates as reports suggested that Islamist militants are heading for the area where they are held and intend to seize them. **Page 3**

### Litvinenko clouds talks

The ghost of Alexander Litvinenko, the dissident former agent killed in London, loomed large over attempts by Britain's Foreign Secretary David Miliband to thaw relations with Russia. **Page 12**

### Mass sacrifice protest

Plans to sacrifice half a million animals in a two-day Hindu festival in Nepal this month have prompted calls by animal rights activists for the 300-year-old ritual to be banned. **Page 9**

## Inside today

**Space hotel for earthlings — but cost is astronomical**

Page 5

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## Twin Towers ship sails in

The USS New York, a battleship built with steel from the World Trade Centre, sailed into New York harbour yesterday on its maiden voyage, with a 21-gun salute near Ground Zero. **Page 14**



## China fixes early snow

Cloud-seeding by Chinese meteorologists led to the earliest blizzard in Beijing for two decades. The 11-hour snowfall brought the capital to a halt. Hundreds of flights were delayed. **Page 14**





Velcro suits would be provided by Galactic Suite, to allow guests to cling to the walls of the spacecraft. According to the company, 43 people have already made reservations for the trip

## Best hotel in the galaxy – but where's the atmosphere?

Spain  
Graham Keeley Barcelona

Most people's idea of a weekend getaway might be a break in the Cotswolds, Devon or perhaps Provence. A select group of well-heeled adventurers, however, may soon be able to aim higher: three nights in a hotel in space.

The new breed of tourists will see the Sun rise 80 times during their stay, the Spanish tour operator says, but it admits that the bill for the journey of a lifetime will be an astronomical £2.7 million.

According to Galactic Suite Space Resort, would-be stargazers are already queuing up to don their space-suits, with more than 200 people having expressed an interest and 43 made reservations.

If the project has something of a Trekkie fantasy about it, it is because it started life as a hobby for Xavier Claramunt, a space enthusiast and chief operating officer of Galactic Suite. A former aerospace engineer, Mr Claramunt says that his company is at the forefront of the emerging industry of space tourism. "It is normal to think that your children, perhaps within 15 years, could spend a week in space," he insists.

To beat the awkward effects of weightlessness, Galactic Suite plans to dress its guests in Velcro suits, allowing them to stick to the spacecraft walls. A single pod, accommodating four paying guests and two astronauts, will be in orbit 280 miles above the Earth, circling the planet at 30,000km (19,000mph) an hour.

It will take a day-and-a-half to reach the space pod, Mr Claramunt

### Wish you were here?

● The Ice Hotel in Jukkasjärvi, Sweden, 200km north of the Arctic Circle, is rebuilt every November and closes in April as it starts to melt

● Guests dive down 21ft (6.5m) to the Jules Undersea Lodge off Key Largo, Florida. An umbilical cable delivers fresh air, water and power

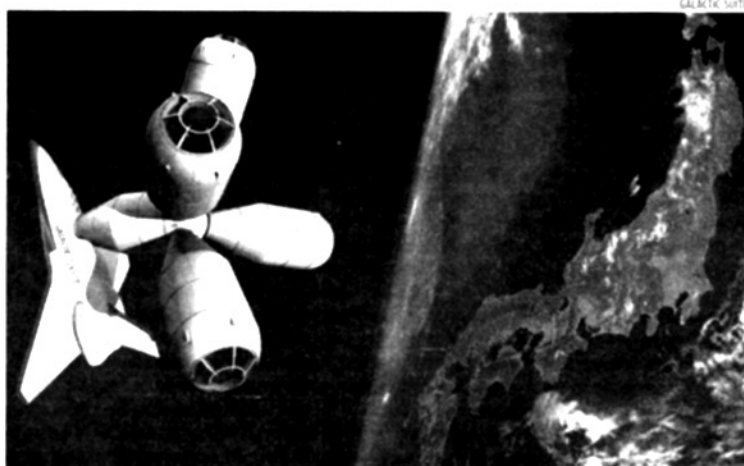
● There are fire-hydrant-shaped toilets for guests who need to cock a leg at the beagle-shaped Dog Bark Park Inn, Idaho, USA

Source: UnusualHotelsOfTheWorld.com

said. "When the passengers arrive in the rocket, [the astronauts] will join it for three days, rocket and capsule. With this we create in the tourist a confidence that he hasn't been abandoned," he said.

Mr Claramunt says that a mystery billionaire has financed the €3 billion (£2.5 billion) project. An insider at the Spanish Technical Centre for the Aeronautical and Space Industry said that the company had underestimated the cost of the project, with a suborbital shuttle alone costing €1 billion.

Even if his idea does get off the ground, Mr Claramunt faces some stiff competition. Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic is poised to take advantage of the first facility built specifically for fee-paying passengers. The British tycoon plans to offer suborbital rides at £122,053. Construction of Spaceport America, which aims to offer a commercial space service, is already under way in New Mexico.

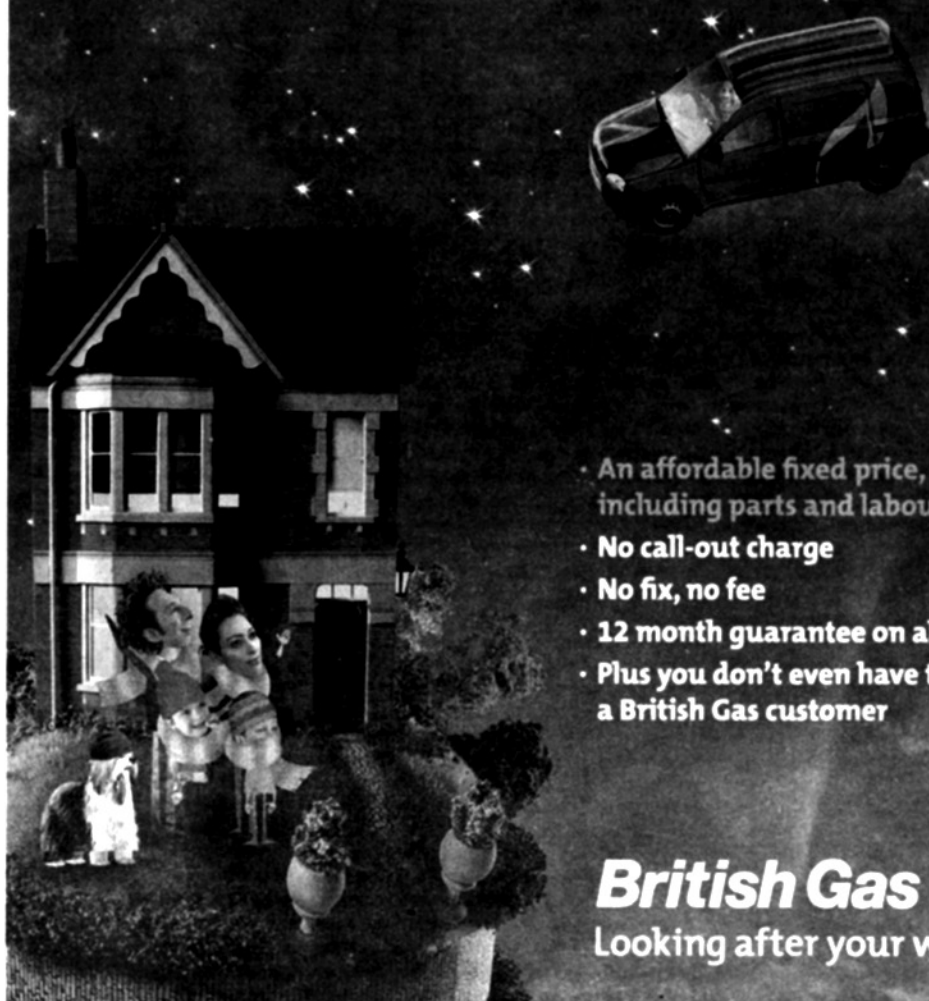


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