



PERSIAN LETTERS

Despite The Economic Crisis, There's Still Room For Jokes In Iran

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Iranians have been turning to humor to help them cope with a bleak economic situation.

Anxiety, fear, and hopelessness are becoming part of the daily lives of many Iranians as the country confronts a deepening economic crisis. The value of the national currency, the rial, has lost some 40 percent of its value.

But despite the difficult times, Iranians have apparently not lost their sense of humor, finding fodder for jokes in the sliding currency and their own misery.

As one Tehran-based businessman told RFE/RL, "We share jokes [and] we try to laugh at these dark days. What else are we supposed to do?"

We've compiled several of the jokes that are making the rounds on the streets of the capital and other cities.

Here's one that refers to comments made by Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad on the eve of his 2005 election victory, when he said the country's real problems are unemployment and housing shortages -- not young people's appearances.

That comment has now become infamous, as Ahmadinejad is blamed for the economic free-fall:

The day when Ahmadinejad said, "Are the hairstyles of the youth our problem? Let's instead fix the economy," we were really lucky that he didn't want to fix our hair -- because by now, we would all be bald!

Some jokes, like this one, make fun of the fluctuation of the rial, which seems to be losing value against the U.S. dollar from one second to the next:

*How many rials are in a dollar?
Now, or... now?*

The economic crisis is making it increasingly difficult for middle-class Iranians, including many of the country's educated youth, to make ends meet. In this joke, a man whose profession would normally promise a high standard of living for his wife-to-be feels the need to pretend he has a job that has suddenly become quite lucrative:

A man goes to ask for the hand of a young woman. The woman's family asks about the suitor's job. To impress them, he says that he is a currency dealer on Manuchehri Street [in Tehran]. Only later does the family realize that he's just an engineer.

Here are some others:

An Iranian, an American, and a German die and go to hell. They each get permission to call home. The American is charged \$1000 for his call, the German is charged \$2000 for his call, but it only costs the Iranian \$1 dollar to reach home. The American and the German ask why the Iranian was charged so little. They are told, "He made a local call."

If two people can't make ends meet anymore, can five or six people all marry each other to make it work financially?

A man takes his son to the zoo. He says, "Son, what you see is a chicken. We used to eat them when we were rich."

-- Golnaz Esfandiari

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