

The Guardian newspaper in the UK reported today:

Live television is hardly the most convenient setting in which to be reminded of the age-old proverb that only children and fools speak the truth.

So the father who nicknamed his child's toy monkey after Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, must have been mortified to have his private joke cruelly exposed when the youngster took part in one of the country's most popular TV phone-ins.

The embarrassing disclosure was made on Amoo Pourang (Uncle Pourang), a programme watched by millions of Iranian children three times a week on state TV. It came when the unsuspecting presenter, Dariush Farziayi, asked the name of the toy animal his young caller had been given as a reward for good behaviour.

"Well, my father calls him Ahmadinejad," the child replied.

Now the father's discomfort has spread to the programme-makers after the state broadcaster, IRIB, responded by withdrawing it from viewing schedules.

The final episode will be screened next week after a successful seven-year run.

A conservative website, Jahan News, quoting "reliable sources," said the decision was prompted by the "high financial and spiritual damage" inflicted by live broadcasts. Stopping short of identifying the president by name, it highlighted an incident in which "a child in a live telephone line compared its doll to one of the well-known authorities and managers".

The incident is believed to have been the last straw following several other naive indiscretions by callers, which caused acute embarrassment and offended Iran's religious conservative mores.

In one instance, Farziayi was left open mouthed and groping for an appropriate response when, after asking a participant to hand the phone to his mother or father, he was told: "They are in the shower."

On another occasion, asking which of two twins was kissed first by their father on his return home from work, he was answered: "My daddy always kisses mummy first."

It is not the first Iranian broadcast to become a victim of the pitfalls of live transmissions. In the 1980s, the spiritual leader of the Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, pronounced death sentences for the makers of a radio programme in which a female respondent named a Japanese soap opera character as her role model, rather than Fatimah, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter. They were later pardoned.