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Iran bans book as promoting prostitution; interest soars

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TEHRAN, Iran — An Iranian government decision to forbid the second printing of a translation of a book by Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez has spurred interest in the book, booksellers said Saturday.

The novel was translated into Persian and had an initial press run of 5,000 copies. It was banned only after the Ministry of Culture received complaints from conservatives who believed the novel was promoting prostitution.

The ban has only provoked greater interest, and on Saturday copies were being sold for more than twice their list price.

The novel, known as "Memories of My Melancholy Whores" in the West, was translated into Persian as "Memories of My Melancholy Sweethearts."

It tells the story of an elderly man who had long used prostitutes and decides to mark his 90th birthday by sleeping with a 14-year-old virgin. He ends up falling in love with the girl.

The Culture Ministry, whose censors are responsible for checking the contents of books before print, said a "bureaucratic error" led to the government giving permission for the novel to be published, the daily Etemad reported Saturday.

The culture minister said the official who authorized the book's publication has been dismissed, the semiofficial Fars news agency reported.

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