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When silence is CORROSIVE

WE hope that before you read this the Prime Minister may have issued a categorical statement about the death two days ago of a young security detainee at John Vorster Square.

His silence and that of his senior police officers has been conspicuous. It has implied a deeper embarrassment than even the overt facts warrant. And the corresponding silence of the SABC has not helped. It has served only to foster rumour and speculation.

What is needed to allay the deep dismay of thinking South Africans of all creeds and groups is

(a) a full and frank statement about what actually happened to Ahmed Timol; and

(b) a top-level command that bullying or torture by over-zealous agents—which is what the public cannot avoid suspecting—will not be tolerated under any circumstances and will form no part of police procedure.

It would be more realistic still if the Prime Minister could see his way to announcing that detention without trial and all it implies is abandoned as being in itself a threat to security.

Mr Vorster will be misjudging public feeling if he regards the outcry at the fate of Ahmed Timol as merely a party political campaign.

Ten suicides and at least four other deaths of security detainees create a situation which disturbs the sleep of all conscientious citizens.

This is not only on humanitarian grounds. It is also because once the public gets the idea that the security police are not protective but punitive, all confidence in the ability of that force to protect the country is lost.