

No indoor venue: Timol meeting off

Staff Reporter

TOMORROW'S Ahmed Timol Memorial meeting was called off last night when the organisers gave up trying to find an indoor venue. Earlier the Minister of Justice had banned open air public meetings "of a political nature" in and around Johannesburg for two weeks from today.

After hours of legal consultations — during which they ignored two Government departments which refused permission for the meeting, and a threat of police prosecution — they announced they had cancelled their plans.

The Minister, Mr. Peet Pelser, said in Pretoria yesterday he decided on the ban because he "deemed the action to be expedient for the maintenance of public peace as a result of political activities by certain individuals and organisations." He refused to enlarge on his statement.

A proclamation in the Government Gazette, which followed his statement, banned open-air meetings in the following areas: Alberton, Benoni, Boksburg, Brakpan, Germiston,

Heidelberg, Johannesburg, Kempton Park, Krugersdorp, Nigel, Pretoria, Randfontein, Roodepoort, Springs, Vanderbijlpark, Vereeniging and Westonaria.

The order, in terms of the Riotous Assemblies Act, prohibits assembly in any public place at "which any form of State or any principle or policy of the Government or a State is propagated, defended, attacked, criticised or discussed or which is held in protest against or in support of, or in commemoration of, anything."

Mr. Timol, a Terrorism Act detainee, died in a fall from the 10th floor of John Vorster Square in Johannesburg two years ago. Tomorrow's meeting was to have commemorated his death and the deaths in detention of 21 others. It would also have called for the release of political prisoners.

The United Party and the Progressive Party hit out at the Government ban yesterday. The Leader of the Opposition, Sir de Villiers Graaff, demanded that the Government "explain the need for this drastic inroad upon the rights of assembly of law-abiding citizens."

He warned that the subject would be fully canvassed during

the next session of Parliament.

The Progressive Party's Houghton MP, Mrs. Helen Suzman, dismissed the action as that of a "frightened Government" and added that "one would have thought they had sufficient power under existing legislation to control any untoward open-air public meeting."

Neither party has functions affected by the ban during the next fortnight.

The Herstigte Nasionale Party deputy leader, Mr. Jaap Marais, said that to include Pretoria and other surrounding "country towns" in "this blanket ban is in the nature of an insult."

The Johannesburg City Council gave permission for the meeting — on a sports field in Vrededorp. But the Department of Community Development and the Department of Bantu Administration refused to give permits.

Miss Jeanette Curtis, a member of the organising committee, said a "Lieutenant Rootman of the Group Areas branch of the police telephoned and said if he thought an offence had been committed, he would arrest every Bantu at the meeting, and the organisers'."