



We want nothing to do with cemetery housing

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RESIDENTS of Canaan Street, La Romaine have vowed to stay far away from and refuse any offers to purchase homes which make up an 18-unit, high-rise apartment project being built by Government on the site of an old cemetery. And in a swift response to Newsday's exclusive story on the housing scheme, councillor for the Canaan district within the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation Premnath Boodoosinhg accused the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UDeCOTT) of wilfully failing to seek the corporation's permission to excavate the cemetery. "This is nothing short of desecration of the dead. This is a matter for the council to deliberate on in the interest of bereaved families of loved ones whose final resting place is here," councillor Boodoosinhg told Newsday.

When Newsday revisited the site yesterday, residents living nearby said they intend to seek advice to determine whether they have any legal redress as a result of the graves of relatives buried there, being excavated by UDeCOTT. But residents living closest to the site, said they were less disturbed by the unearthing of skeletal remains of persons buried many years ago, than the prospect that a rich piece of the area's colonial history may be lost forever, for the sake of Government housing. They said the large tomb of the Lamont family, who were British planters including Sir Norman Lamont, Royden Lamont and John Lamont was precariously close to the excavated site. The Lamonts are buried on the site which they once owned as part of their sugar estate at Canaan, La Romaine. "No! Absolutely not. They should not do what they are doing. They are getting too close to the Lamont family tomb," said Marcus Matthew, a resident of Canaan.

"There's too much history in that place," Matthew added. Matthew said he planned to mobilise villagers to protest any attempt to "touch" the tombs. "I as a boy growing up, my grandparents and many others, taught us the history of the Lamont family. This is a part of Trinidad's colonial history that could be lost," Matthew said. He added that if given the opportunity to apply for one of the apartments, he would bluntly refuse. "How can I live on a burial ground. How can I do that?" Another resident Wayne Ramlochan, who operates Ramlochan's Auto Supplies near the site, said, "I will not accept a house on a burial site. But of more concern to me is the tomb of the Lamont family which I think should be preserved." Stacy Matthew gave a blunt reply when asked if she would apply for the apartments: "Absolutely not ... how can I live on top of dead people?"