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Soko Ranuqanuqa works on the crypt that will be the tomb for the late Archbishop Petero Mataka beneath the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Suva yesterday. Report on **PAGE 3**.

Picture: JONE LUVENITOGA

Tongan minister offers Minerva Reef solution 'Give up Lau'



Lord Ma'afu.
Picture: SUPPLIED

By AVINESH GOPAL

TONGA'S Lands Minister Lord Ma'afu has revealed a proposal for the island kingdom to give up the disputed Minerva Reef to Fiji in exchange for the Lau Group.

The Minerva Reef has been at the centre of a dispute on ownership between the two countries.

Lord Ma'afu wants to make a proposal to Fiji that Tonga gets the Lau Group in exchange for Minerva Reef.

The Noble of Vaini on Tongatapu revealed this in an interview with *Tonga Daily News*' manager/editor Il-

iesa Tora last week, saying the row between the two countries over the ownership of Minerva Reef was not good for relations.

The reef, which is home to lucrative undersea minerals, was claimed by Tonga in 1972 and was declared by King 'Taufa'ahau Tupou IV as a Tongan island.

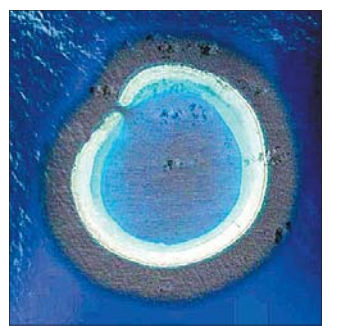
But in 2005, Fiji lodged a complaint with the International Seabed Authority concerning Tonga's claim over the reef.

"It is not good for our relations. We are closely related and our history dates back a long, long time," Lord

Ma'afu said.

"So in good faith I will propose to the Minister for Foreign Affairs in Fiji that they can have Minerva Reef and we get Lau in return.

"We have a lot of our own people with Lauan ancestry and a lot of Lauans with Tongan ancestry," said Lord Ma'afu, who is named after Ma'afu, the Tongan prince who played a key role in the early part of Fiji's history.



North Minerva Reef.
Picture: www.angnz.com

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What do you think?



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