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In this image from a video shot by Hong Kong broadcaster TVB, Hong Kong Bishop Stephen Chow talks to media during his visit to Beijing, with unidentified men standing behind him, on Thursday, April 20, 2023. (TVB via AP)

by Associated Press

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Hong Kong's Roman Catholic bishop said in a [historic trip to Beijing](#) that he hopes the dioceses of the two cities will have more exchanges and cooperation, local media reported April 20 amid signs of Sino-Vatican strains.

Bishop Stephen Chow made the remarks during a Mass that was also attended by his counterpart in Beijing, Hong Kong's public broadcaster RTHK said. Chow later told reporters he was encouraged to visit other dioceses.

"I hope that this is not the last time," Chow said.

His five-day trip is the first visit to Beijing by Hong Kong's bishop in nearly three decades and came two weeks after Vatican News, the news portal of the Holy See, reported that China had unilaterally appointed a new bishop to Shanghai.

China's ruling Communist Party closely controls organized religion, which it sees as a potential threat to its monopoly on power. People are allowed to worship in institutions that abide by party rules. Some Christians have set up underground churches, which are considered illegal and harassed by authorities.

The [Vatican and China signed a provisional agreement](#) over the appointment of bishops in 2018, a breakthrough on an issue that stymied diplomatic relations for decades and aggravated a split among Chinese Catholics.

The agreement on Catholic bishops has been renewed twice, most recently in October for two more years. But a feud broke out a month later over the [installation of an auxiliary bishop in Jiangxi](#) province, which the Vatican does not recognize as a diocese.

The deal has been harshly criticized by Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen.

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Another local broadcaster, i-Cable News, quoted Chow as saying his trip was mainly about exchanges between dioceses, so they did not talk much on the issue of China and the Vatican.

After the April 20 Mass, some churchgoers in Beijing told local media they welcomed more exchanges between the two dioceses.

Chow, who was named by Pope Francis as Hong Kong's bishop in 2021, began his trip April 17 and joined a prayer session at a church that evening. On April 19, he visited the tomb of Matteo Ricci, one of the first Jesuits to live in China, who died in Beijing in 1610, RTHK reported. The visit was invited by his Beijing counterpart.