

# King's trip to France called off

**PARIS:** Violent protests against pensions reform in France have led to the postponement of King Charles's visit, highlighting the growing security and political problems faced by President Emmanuel Macron.

The French leader condemned the violence overnight, but the Council of Europe criticised the police's "excessive use of force" used in recent demonstrations.

King Charles' first foreign trip as British monarch had been intended to highlight warming Franco-British relations. Instead, it has underlined the severity of the demonstrations.

Mr Macron asked for the postponement during talks on Friday, a British government spokesman said, the change blamed on a call for fresh strikes next Tuesday, the second day of the King's tour.

Police made 450 arrests on Thursday, and said 441 members of the security forces were injured during the most violent day of protests against Macron's bid to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64.

More than 900 fires were lit around Paris with radical anarchist groups blamed for setting uncollected rubbish ablaze and smashing shop windows, leading to clashes with riot police.

But rights groups, magistrates and left-wing politicians have also denounced alleged police brutality.

And the Council of Europe – the continent's human rights watchdog – warned that sporadic acts of violence "cannot justify excessive use of force by agents of the state" or "deprive peaceful protesters of their right to freedom of assembly".

In Bordeaux, protesters set fire to the ancient wooden entrance to the city hall. King Charles had been set to visit the southwestern city on Tuesday, after a day in Paris.

Some Parisians felt the cancellation would avoid further embarrassment for France, with protesters threatening to disrupt the royal visit and the streets strewn with rubbish due to a strike by waste collectors.

The second leg of Charles' European tour – to Germany – is expected to proceed as scheduled on Wednesday.

Renee Kelly and husband Karvan Jayaweera with their children, William and Luke, born via IVF. Picture: Jason Edwards



## REALISED DREAMS OF FAMILY

RENEE Kelly was told she had a 2-8 per cent chance of getting pregnant in her late 30s after being diagnosed with endometriosis.

She underwent six rounds of IVF to have her two sons Luke, now 4, and William, four months.

William was born when Ms Kelly was aged 40, and after the medical sales representative, 41, from Melbourne took part in a clinical trial using the Piezo ICSI technique.

"We just thought that there was better odds with ICSI than just doing it the traditional way, which is just letting the sperm find the egg. And (with William) we used Piezo, which uses vibration and is supposed to mimic what happens in real life," she said. IVF was difficult.

"I definitely dealt with depression ... I needed support from a psychologist and I did end up on antidepressants. I'm just being honest because I feel like that's the right thing to do for other women," she said. With two healthy kids at the end of her IVF journey, she said: "It feels like a brand new chapter, like I was able to actualise our dreams as a couple."

Breakthrough 'cotton wool' IVF technique is making ...

# BUDDING BUBS

### SUE DUNLEVY

FIRST there were the cotton wool kids – now meet the cotton wool embryos.

A breakthrough IVF treatment which uses a "super soft way" of fertilising sub-optimal eggs is helping Aussie women realise their dreams of having a baby.

The Piezo ICSI technique uses a gentle high-speed vibration motion similar to a jelly wobble to gently penetrate an egg with a sperm.

In a Monash IVF trial, 16 babies were born using the Japanese-developed Piezo technique compared with just one baby with regular Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection,

Monash IVF Group medical director Luk Rombauts said.

"We also found Piezo results in more embryos being created per cycle, which can then be frozen for future use, presumably because it causes less internal stress in the egg," Prof Rombauts said.

Monash IVF Group chief scientific officer Associate Professor Deirdre Zander Fox said the "technology is particularly beneficial for women aged over 38 years, whose egg quality is usually poorer due to their age, and for women with fragile eggs".

One in 18 births in Australia are the result of IVF, and over four decades, pregnancy success rates have increased

fivefold from just 10 per cent to 50 per cent in some clinics.

Monash IVF is also trialling a new Australian developed sperm separator called Felix to isolate the healthiest sperm from a sample.

The Felix system is based on the fact that the healthiest sperm cells and those with the least DNA damage are negatively charged.

"Basically we put the ejaculate into a device passing an electric current across it. The sperm cells are pulled by the current across a membrane and into a harvest chamber from which we collect them," Professor John Aitken, who developed the technology, said.

The method is 10 times faster than conventional techniques and the trial will determine whether the new technique improves IVF pregnancy rates.

"You do want to have the best sperm and the best eggs to make the best embryo to give the best chance of a successful healthy baby," Monash IVF male infertility expert Professor Rob McLachlan said.

IVF provider Genea is experimenting with artificial intelligence to improve IVF outcomes. It uses computers to match thousands of hormone profiles to thousands of successful pregnancies, then figures out the right

dose of hormones needed in each age group to produce the best eggs. Genea plans to look at the genetic factors in each woman that affect their hormone receptors so it can tailor the fertility treatment to the individual.

It expects to deliver a "drastic" improvement in its ability to provide better outcomes for patients across the next five to 10 years.

Elsewhere, Symex Labs is building an innovative biosensor patch that can continuously track ovulation using hormone sensing, similar to the way continuous glucose monitoring works for type 1 diabetes management. [sue.dunlevy@news.com.au](mailto:sue.dunlevy@news.com.au)



# World must end 'vampiric overconsumption' of water

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has delivered an urgent call for the world to modify and safeguard water resources to avert conflict and ensure global prosperity.

Water is "the most precious common good," and "needs to be at the centre of the global political agenda," Mr Guterres said at the end of a three-day UN conference that experts said held some promise.

"All of humanity's hopes for

the future depend, in some way, on charting a new science-based course to bring the water action agenda to life," he said. "Now is the time to act."

The world is not on track to meet its 2030 water goals, including safe drinking water and sanitation for all.

Mr Guterres earlier in the week said water was humanity's "lifeline" and its "vampiric overconsumption" had "broken the water cycle"

and led to more natural disasters.

NGOs, governments and the private sector offered nearly 700 commitments before and during the three days of the UN gathering that drew 10,000 participants.

Pledges ranged from the construction of toilets to the restoration of 300,000km of degraded rivers and massive areas of wetlands.

Less than a third of the

commitments have funding, said Charles Iceland of the World Resources Institute think tank, adding that about a third will have a substantial effect. Despite this, "these voluntary commitments are a good start," he said, referring in particular to a project led by Germany on the management of the Niger River basin, which affects nine African nations.

"It's probably the part of the world that is the most fragile,

and where we're starting to see actual violent conflict over water between different groups," he said.

But at the global level, the water "is a huge problem and one conference is not going to do it," Mr Iceland said.

"You hear a lot of pledges," Stuart Orr of WWF said. "But this feels somehow quite different ... This issue is not going away. The water issue is only going to get worse."

### Backroom Baz

## POLITICAL GOSSIP

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