

Crazy in love?

Japanese man got 'married' to a hologram by spending \$17,600 on a formal ceremony at a Tokyo hall

AFP | Tokyo, Japan

Akihiko Kondo's mother refused an invitation to her only son's wedding in Tokyo this month, but perhaps that isn't such a surprise: he was marrying a hologram.

"For mother, it wasn't something to celebrate," said the soft-spoken 35-year-old, whose "bride" is a virtual reality singer named Hatsune Miku.

In fact, none of Kondo's relatives attended his wedding to Miku -- an animated 16-year-old with saucer eyes and lengthy aquamarine pigtails -- but that didn't stop him from spending two million yen (\$17,600) on a formal ceremony at a Tokyo hall.

Around 40 guests watched as he tied the knot with Miku, present in the form of a cat-sized stuffed doll.

"I never cheated on her, I've always been in love with Miku-san," he said, using a honorific that is commonly employed in Japan, even by friends.

"I've been thinking about

her every day," he said a week after the wedding.

Since March, Kondo has been living with a moving, talking hologram of Miku that floats in a \$2,800 desktop device.

"I'm in love with the whole concept of Hatsune Miku but I got married to the Miku of my house," he said, looking at the blue image glowing in a capsule.

'Drop dead, creepy otaku!'

He considers himself an ordinary married man -- his holographic wife wakes him up each morning and sends him off to his job as an administrator at a school.

In the evening, when he tells her by cellphone that he's coming home, she turns on the lights.

Later, she tells him when it's time to go to bed.

He sleeps alongside the doll version of her that attended the wedding, complete with a wedding ring that fits around her



I'm in love with the whole concept of Hatsune Miku but I got married to the Miku of my house

AKIHIKO KONDO

left wrist.

Kondo's marriage might not have any legal standing, but that doesn't bother him. He even took his Miku doll to a jewellery shop to get the ring.

And Gatebox, the company that produces the hologram device featuring Miku, has issued a "marriage certificate", which certifies that a human and a virtual character have wed "beyond dimensions".

Kondo's not alone either: he says Gatebox has issued more than 3,700 certificates for "cross-dimension" marriages and some people have sent him supportive messages.

"There must be some people who can't come forward and say they want to hold a wedding. I want to give them a supportive push," he says.

Kondo's path to Miku came after difficult encounters with women as an anime-mad teenager.

"Girls would say 'Drop dead, creepy otaku!'," he recalled, using a Japanese term for geeks that can carry a negative connotation.

As he got older, he says a woman at a previous workplace bullied him into a nervous breakdown and he became determined never to marry.

In Japan, that wouldn't be entirely unusual nowadays. While in 1980, only one in 50 men had never married by the age of 50, that figure is now one in four.

But eventually Kondo realised he had been in love with Miku for more than a decade and decided to marry her.

A 'sexual minority'

"Miku-san is the woman I love a lot and also the one who saved me," he said.



Akihiko Kondo poses with a doll of Japanese virtual reality singer Hatsune Miku, as he shows their marriage certificate

And while Kondo says he is happy to be friends with a "3D woman", he has no interest in romance with one, no matter how much his mother pushes for it.

Two-dimensional characters can't cheat, age or die, he points out.

"I'm not seeking these in real women. It's impossible."

Even in a country obsessed with anime, Kondo's wedding shocked many. But he wants to be recognised as a "sexual minority" who can't imagine dating a flesh-and-blood woman.

"It's simply not right, it's as if you were trying to talk a gay man into dating a woman, or a lesbian into a relationship with a man."

"Diversity in society has been long called for," he added.

"It won't necessarily make you happy to be bound to the 'template' of happiness in which a man and woman marry and bear children."

"I believe we must consider all kinds of love and all kinds of happiness."



Akihiko Kondo poses next to the dolls of Japanese virtual reality singer Hatsune Miku



A doll of Japanese virtual reality singer Hatsune Miku, wearing a wedding ring, lies on the bed of Japanese Akihiko Kondo

Suspension of Sri Lanka parliament challenged in court

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Supporters of Sri Lanka's fired prime minister and a top election official yesterday challenged in court the president's sacking of parliament, upping the ante in a political crisis that has sparked international alarm.

President Maithripala Sirisena late Friday called snap elections and dissolved the legislature, two weeks after sacking the prime minister and installing the divisive Mahinda Rajapakse

in his place.

The United States has led a chorus of international voices expressing concern over events in the strategically important Indian Ocean island nation of 21 million people.

Three political parties holding an absolute majority in parliament and an election commissioner, one of three officials tasked with conducting polls, on Monday asked the Supreme Court to declare the president's actions illegal.

Commissioner Ratnajeevan

Hoole was among 12 petitioners arguing that Sirisena had violated the constitution.

In the five-page petition, Hoole said Sirisena broke the law in calling the snap elections for January 5 after a string of unconstitutional moves since October 26 when he fired Ranil Wickremesinghe, the prime minister.

Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP), the main opposition Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the leftist JVP, or People's Liberation Front jointly



Had I allowed the parliament to meet on November 14, there would have been violence in the House and it could have spread to our villages and towns

MAITHRIPALA SIRISENA

filed the action.

TNA spokesman M. A. Sumanthiran said the Supreme Court agreed to rake up the petitions immediately considering the importance of the issue.

"We are also asking for an interim order" for an injunction against preparations for the election, which would be two years ahead of schedule, Sumanthiran said.

Court officials said Chief Justice Nalin Perera and two other judges decided to fast-track the hearings.

Sarath Amunugama, Sirisena's anointed foreign minister, told Colombo-based diplomats Monday that he expected a verdict within five days.

Legal experts say the dissolved parliament would have to be restored if the Supreme Court holds with the petitioners. If not, the January 5 election will have to go ahead.

Independent election monitors have also questioned the legality of the snap poll announced by Sirisena.