

## Tharoor says 'sorry' for his 'cattle class' remarks

Reacting on the controversy over his 'cattle class' remarks, Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor Thursday night said he was 'sorry' for hurting any sentiments and that his words had been misunderstood.

Tharoor ran into trouble for a message he posted on the social networking site Twitter in which he said sarcastically in response to a query that he would travel 'cattle class out of solidarity with all our holy cows!'

Congress spokesperson Jayanthi Natarajan had termed the phrase as 'unacceptable' and said Tharoor was perhaps not conscious of local sensitivities since he was new to Indian politics.

The minister who is in Liberia on an official visit tweeted late night Thursday that he had, 'learned belatedly of fuss over my tweet replying to journo's query whether I would travel to Kerala in 'cattle class'.'

He pointed out that the phrase 'cattle class' was used in the query, which he just repeated.

'It's a silly expression but means no disrespect to economy travellers, only to airlines for herding us in like cattle. Many have misunderstood,' he tweeted.

He admitted that if the phrase when translated into Malayalam sounded worse, especially if taken out of context. 'To those hurt by the belief that my repeating the phrase showed contempt: sorry,' said Tharoor.

He also explained that the word 'holy cows' was not referring to any individuals. 'Holy cows are NOT individuals but sacrosanct issues or principles that no one dares challenge. Wish critics would look it up.'

The minister said that he had learnt a lesson from the episode. 'I now realise I should not assume people will appreciate humour. You should not give those who would wilfully distort your words an opportunity to do so.'

Besides, Tharoor also mentioned that he had excellent meetings with the Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and other dignitaries. He is the first minister in 38 years to visit the West African nation.

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