



SDP 2041

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OPINION

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Apple Import from US: Balancing Trade or Squeezing Locals?

From fields to shores: Seb Utpadak Sangh and NR Cultivate Connections to ferry HP Apple & Off season Vegetables to Kerela & Kolkata



Photo used for indicative purpose only. Source: Internet

VISHAL SARIN
SHIMLA

Following the Government of India's decision to reduce the import duty on Washington Apples by twenty percent, concerns have arisen regarding its impact on the sales and prices of Himachal apples. Farmers argue that this decision comes at a time when the apple crop is already facing failures.

They fear that local traders and middlemen could exploit the domestic market during the opening apple season, leading to decreased demand and lower prices for domestic produce. The Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh has criticized the decision, stating that it goes against the interests of apple growers.

According to a media report, the harvesting of Washington

Apples begins in August and extends until November. This cycle allows for fruit exports to India from mid-September through November. Following this, supplies from cold storage apples are expected during winters, followed by controlled atmosphere chamber apples from February to August.

It is worth noting that the total

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ML VERMA
SHIMLA

Seb Utpadak Sangh, under the leadership of former CPI(M) MLA Rakesh Singha and Kissan Sabha leader Dr. Kuldeep Singh Tanwar, recently held consultations with Northern Railway to discuss the transportation of Himachal's apples and off-season vegetables to major vegetable and fruit markets such as Kerala and Kolkata. The aim was to secure subsidized rates for the transportation of fresh produce via high-speed goods trains.

During a high-level meeting between SUS and senior officials of Northern Railway in Shimla, the farmers' leaders discussed the feasibility of transporting

fresh produce to coastal markets using goods trains, and freight charges were addressed. The farmer leaders urged the commercial wings of Indian Railways to allow farmer cooperative societies to transport their produce to the Southern Railway and Eastern Railway zones, including Kerala and Kolkata, starting from Kalka and Chandigarh. The farmers have been facing a market slump, and even during the lean apple season, they have been unable to obtain profitable prices in the local APMC market. Exploitation by middlemen and the entry of corporate players into the apple market have made fruit production

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Apple Import from US: Balancing Trade or Squeezing Locals?

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apple production in India is 24.37 lakh tonnes, with Himachal Pradesh accounting for 6.44 lakh tonnes. Reportedly, imports of apples amount to only about 4 to 4.5 lakh tonnes. The trend of import growth from 2013-14, starting at 1.75 lakh tonnes, has reached 3.73 lakh tonnes in 2022-23.

Furthermore, the reduction in import duty on Washington Apples represents the duty imposed in 2018 as a retaliatory measure. The United States will still have to pay a 50 percent import duty. In response to the Trump Administration's imposition of 25 percent duties on steel and 10 percent on aluminum from India in 2019, India had imposed a 70 percent duty on Washington apples.

While the debate continues about the impact on Himachal Pradesh apples, it is relevant to mention that data cited in the media report suggests that since 2018, while the US has experienced losses, other countries have benefited from increased apple exports, with no significant impact on apple prices in India. Currently, US apple exports have decreased to 4,486 tonnes, but it remains uncertain how much they can recover in a year. The peak was 1.28 lakh tonnes in 2018-19.

Naresh Chauhan, the Principal Advisor to Chief Minister (Media), expressed dissatisfaction with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to reduce the import duty on Washington Apples by 20 percent, considering it a betrayal of the state's horticulturists. Chauhan labeled the central government's decision as anti-gardener and stated that the state government would demand an increase in import duty to 100 percent in order to protect the interests of apple growers. He emphasized that Himachal Pradesh is known as the apple state and that apple production significantly contributes to the country's economy. Approximately 7 lakh people in the state are associated with the horticulture business, and apples are grown in 6 to 7 districts, involving around 1.5 lakh families. Apple production is a major industry in the state, providing direct or indirect employment to laborers and street vendors. Chauhan also called upon the state BJP leaders to clarify their stance on this issue and express whether they support the farmers and gardeners or not.

As the debate between political parties continues, it will be interesting to assess, by the end of the apple season, the impact of the Government of India's decision and whether it will harm the prospects of Himachal apples or leave them unaffected.

non-profitable, despite the apple quality being suitable for international export.

Mr. Singha, addressing the SUS convention in Shimla, stated that farmers are being manipulated by ruling parties such as the BJP and Congress, who divide them based on emotional issues like religion and region. He urged farmers to recognize these tactics and fight against the ruling parties, as they tend to side with corporate interests and cannot be trusted. He emphasized the need for farmers to be paid promptly for their crops and for strict enforcement of the APMC act in the market.

Mr. Singh highlighted how farmers are falling into the trap of middlemen who discourage the use of universal standard cartons, which prescribe a standard weight of 20 kg for all apple markets, as notified by the State Marketing Board. He stressed the importance of forming cooperatives and competing with market forces to protect apple farming, as big corporations aim to capture lands through contract farming and make apple farming profitable for themselves. He also criticized the three Farm Laws introduced by the BJP government, which resulted in the deaths of over 500 farmers during the protests.

Dr. Tanwar emphasized the need for SUS to raise awareness among farmers regarding the nexus between corporate houses, bureaucracy, and politicians who are unresponsive to the farmers' movement unless they are united. SUS decided to organize block-wise protests by apple growers in more than 22 blocks of the state where SUS is

From fields to shores: Seb Utpadak Sangh and NR Cultivate Connections

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active, starting on July 6.

Transporting apples within the state is a significant challenge, as the cost of bringing apples from orchards to markets is high, and negotiating truck and railway freight charges becomes burdensome for apple growers. In their 17-point demand charter, SUS leaders also demanded changes in this regard. Interestingly, Himachal apples are primarily destined for offshore markets and will now compete with foreign apples on the coast as they will be transported by train to consumers.

Dr. Tanwar, who is involved in the Himachal Pradesh Literacy Mission, pointed out that only 25% of the population can afford to consume apples due to their high retail cost.

He highlighted the exploitation of farmers by middlemen, as they are not receiving fair prices while facing increasing production costs, such as rising fuel prices, labor charges, and transport costs.

SUS leaders also demanded the removal of toll collection barriers that unauthorized individuals set up to collect money from apple growers. They noted that apart from apples, no taxes or levies are imposed on other vegetables and agricultural crops. They also criticized the violation of APMC rules, as farmers are charged at toll barriers and collection centers established by the state government.

The imposition of GST on apple cartons remains a major unresolved issue, although the new Congress party has promised to

abolish it without announcing a decision yet.

The state government has notified the implementation of universal standard packaging material or cartons, but it has not provided the appropriate standard material based on weight and size. Dr. Tanwar stated that apple growers continue to send their crops in packaging exceeding the standard weight of 24 to 38 kg, which needs to be stopped as per the directive from the state Agriculture Marketing Board. Dr. Tanwar added that if Indian Railways agree to offer subsidized freight for farmers, French beans could be sent to the South Indian market, followed by half boxes of apples.

The farmers believe that half boxes have high demand in the South Indian vegetable and fruit market, and they are likely to fetch good prices if middlemen are kept away until the produce is auctioned in the market.

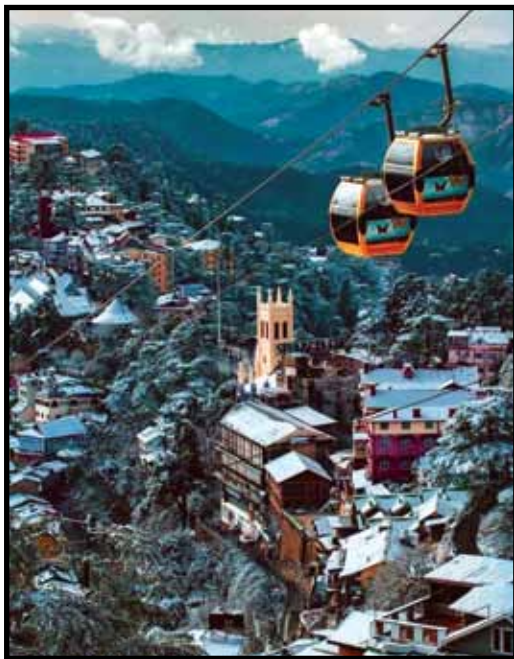
Dr. Tanwar also mentioned that SUS believes farmers' cooperatives should be allotted about 70 to 80% of the space in the state's cold storage chain at subsidized rates, allowing farmers to store long-shelf-life fruit varieties like Royal. Dr. Singha highlighted the prevailing misconception in the apple market that red-colored apples have the highest demand in the Indian market, whereas in the West and the US, the Green Smith apple fetches the highest price due to its quality.

He suggested that only highly perishable apple varieties should be auctioned in the market, allowing farmers to stock high-shelf-life apples and obtain good prices during the off-season.

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SPA DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2041

Shimla Ropeway Project Set to Transform Public Transportation in Three Phases



revealed about the three-phased ropeway project. The plan aims to address the pressing need for a reliable alternative public transport system in Shimla, where traffic congestion on roads and challenges during snowfall pose significant hurdles for traditional bus systems.

The proposed ropeway project, spearheaded by the Ropeways and Rapid Transport System Development Corporation

H.P.LTD. (RTDC), Government of Himachal Pradesh, aligns perfectly with the city's vision for sustainable and efficient transportation. The project's objective is to provide an eco-friendly,

tourism-enhancing solution while preserving the natural beauty of the state. The ropeway system promises safe, quick, noise-free, and affordable mobility for residents and tourists alike, complemented by smart parking, walkways, and lifts.

There are compelling reasons why ropeways have emerged as the most feasible mode of public transportation in hilly areas such as Shimla. Firstly, they are highly environmentally efficient, emitting significantly less CO2 than bus systems per passenger. With their consistent and predictable travel times, ropeways bypass ground-level traffic, ensuring smooth transportation. The capacity of ropeways to carry up to 10,000 passengers per hour per direction makes them an ideal solution for cities like Shimla, Manali, and Dharamshala.

Moreover, ropeways boast an outstanding safety record, ranking second only to aircraft in terms of secure transport systems. The construction of ropeways is relatively quick, with modular construction methods enabling completion within 12 to

24 months. Their ability to overcome obstacles like rivers, roads, and railways allows seamless connectivity without disrupting other land uses in the city.

The proposed Shimla Ropeway Network is divided into three phases, each catering to different parts of the city. Phase 1 encompasses a network length of 30.80 km, consisting of 8 lines and 31 stations, with a capital cost of INR 1232 Crore. Phase 2 covers 19.14 km of network length, 5 lines, 13 stations, and a capital cost of INR 766 Crore. Lastly, Phase 3 will extend the network by 33.16 km, incorporating 5 lines, 6 stations, and a capital cost of INR 1326 Crore.

To ensure seamless integration with other modes of public transportation, the ropeway project will be connected to existing city bus stops, taxi stands, and parking lots. The multimodal transit hub, consisting of locations such as New ISBT and Old ISBT, will integrate the city bus service with the proposed Metro cable and Medium Capacity Rapid Transit System (MCRTS). Major transit interchange points

including Shoghi, Taradevi bus stand, University point, Kusumpti, and Chota Shimla will also facilitate the integration of different transport systems.

The implementation of the Shimla Ropeway Project promises numerous benefits for the city. It will support economic development, reduce congestion, combat climate change, and improve access to facilities and opportunities for residents. Additionally, the project aims to enhance the quality of travel, catalyze regeneration in local communities, and promote inclusivity by providing safer and more accessible journeys for all.

With the ropeway project poised to reshape Shimla's public transportation landscape, residents and tourists eagerly anticipate the realization of this visionary initiative. As the city embraces a sustainable and efficient future, the completion of the Shimla Ropeway Project in three phases promises to be a game-changer, revolutionizing mobility and preserving the natural beauty of this picturesque destination.

HIMACHALSCAPE DESK SHIMLA

In a major development for Shimla's transportation infrastructure, the Shimla Planning area development plan 2041 has

Tunnels to combat traffic congestion

VISHAL SARIN SHIMLA

Shimla, renowned for its natural beauty and colonial charm, has recently unveiled its much-anticipated Shimla Development Plan (SDP) 2041, aiming to transform the city's infrastructure and tackle the persistent issue of traffic congestion. Drawing inspiration from the visionary proposals of former Mayor Sanjay Chauhan, the SDP incorporates several tunnels at strategic locations to alleviate traffic woes and enhance the overall commuting experience for residents and visitors alike.

Former Mayor Sanjay Chauhan, known for his leftist ideology and commitment to sustainable urban planning, had long advocated for innovative solutions to address the growing traffic congestion in Shimla. Back in 2015, during his tenure under the CPM-led city government, proposals for two tunnels

were approved: one for Lakkad Bazar lift measuring 637 meters, and another for Chhota Shimla measuring 1,197 meters. These proposals were subsequently submitted to the World Bank for approval.

In line with Chauhan's vision and based on comprehensive transportation analysis, the SDP 2041 has suggested the incorporation of four additional tunnels, along with the existing Dhalli Tunnel, Victory Tunnel, and Auckland Tunnel. These proposed tunnels aim to expedite traffic flow, enhance connectivity, and alleviate congestion in crucial areas of the city.

The first tunnel, designated as Tunnel No. 1, will stretch from Tawi to Barrier, measuring 700 meters. This tunnel aims to streamline traffic movement between NH-5 and NH-205, facilitating smoother travel for those heading towards Bilaspur. Additionally, it will significantly

decongest the notorious Boileau-ganj Chowk, known for its narrow right of way and constant traffic snarls.

Tunnel No. 2, measuring 681.25 meters, will connect the bustling Lakkar Bazaar area with the Lift, improving the chaotic traffic scenario along the Circular Road, particularly the stretch from Victory Tunnel to Lakkar Bazaar. This development is expected to provide relief to both commuters and pedestrians navigating the congested streets.

The proposed Tunnel No. 3, spanning 890 meters, will link the Himfed Petrol Pump to IGMC (Indira Gandhi Medical College). This tunnel aims to enhance the level of service on Cart Road, specifically from Himfed to Sanjauli Chowk. It is estimated that this tunnel will divert approximately 36% of the traffic from Cart Road, leading to a substantial reduction in congestion along this critical route.

Lastly, Tunnel No. 4, parallel to the existing Dhalli Tunnel, will measure 190 meters. With the rise in vehicular traffic, the current Dhalli Tunnel experiences heavy congestion, resulting in compromised levels of service. This parallel tunnel will alleviate the strain on the existing infrastructure, allowing for smoother and more efficient traffic flow.

The inclusion of these tunnels in the SDP 2041 reflects the city's commitment to sustainable and forward-thinking urban planning. By prioritizing the construction of these tunnels, Shimla's administration aims to enhance the quality of life for its residents, reduce travel time, and provide a more seamless experience for tourists exploring the city's breathtaking surroundings.

The proposed tunnels are currently pending environmental clearance, and their construction is expected to begin as soon

as approvals are obtained. The ambitious SDP 2041 envisions a future where traffic congestion becomes a thing of the past, making Shimla an even more attractive destination for residents, tourists, and nature enthusiasts alike.

Notably, as the city will soon embark on this transformative journey, Shimla's residents eagerly anticipate the positive changes that these tunnels will bring, ensuring a smoother and more sustainable future for the enchanting hill station.



Miyar project moves high court seeks returns of Rs 28.55 Cr upfront money

ML VERMA
SHIMLA

Another hydel power project, matter has reached the high court. The Miyar Hydro Power project, a 120-megawatt project in Himachal Pradesh, has recently filed a petition in the state's high court, seeking the return of Rs 18 crore upfront money and Rs 10, 55, 72,220, including interest at the rate of 18 percent on both amounts from the date of deposit.

The project was initiated in 2008 with the objective of inviting the private sector to set up a 90 MW hydro power plant in Lahaul-Spiti district on the Chenab River on a build-own-operate-transfer (BOOT) basis. The government advertised the project on June 9, 2008, and the letter of allotment was issued to Miyar

HEP of Hindustan Power Project Private (HPPPL). On November 4, 2011, at the company's request, the installed capacity of the Miyar project was increased to 120 MW. A tri-party pre-implementation agreement was signed on March 22, 2011. HPPPL deposited an upfront premium amount of Rs 18 crore on June 15, 2009. The company was required to submit a Detailed Project Report (DPR) within 36 months from the signing of the agreement to establish the project's Techno Economic Viability. The DPR was submitted to the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) on April 29, 2011.

The petitioner claims that Clause 15 of the pre-implementation agreement entitles them to withdraw from the project and receive a refund of the upfront premium deposited. Further-

more, under Clause 47, no party shall be considered in default under the agreement for breaching any term due to restrictions and onerous regulations imposed by any government or agency beyond its reasonable control. The petitioner conducted a detailed survey and investigation of the Miyar project site, including topographical survey, geological mapping, geotechnical investigation, hydrological studies, environmental studies, and land acquisition, incurring an approximate cost of Rs 73 crore. The Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, granted approval for the Miyar project on July 27, 2012, under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980. However, the acquisition of private land for the project is still under litigation in the Himachal Pradesh High Court.

The petitioner has notified the government about various hindrances faced during the project and requested assistance. Challenges include inadequate access roads and bridges for transportation of heavy equipment and machinery, unreliable power supply for construction, and the delay in the construction of the access road to the project site, which is crucial for project progress. The Border Road Organisation, in a letter dated April 24, 2017, informed the company that the access road is planned for construction by 2023. Due to multiple challenges, such as the non-finalization of the location of the barrage axis and its allied diversion structures, lack of infrastructure and roads, the project's uncompetitiveness in the current power market scenario, and the inflated cost of private

land, the petitioner requested withdrawal from the project on May 14, 2018.

However, on February 28, 2019, the government issued a letter to the petitioner, canceling the Letter of Allotment (LOA) and terminating the pre-implementation agreement. The upfront premium deposit made by the petitioner was also forfeited. The state government subsequently allocated the project to NTPC on September 25, 2029.

The petitioner argues that they should not suffer losses due to the government's faults and wrongdoings. The non-establishment of the project's techno-viability is attributed to the respondent's fault. The civil writ petition was filed b

y the project company on December 6, 2019, and is currently listed in court.

Kirti Thakur: Pioneering change in the male-dominated electrical industry

ML VERMA
SHIMLA

In a remarkable display of skill and determination, Kirti Thakur, a 31-year-old female electrician from Janjheli, Mandi Saraj, has emerged as a trailblazer in her field. Breaking gender stereotypes, Kirti has become a household name by fearlessly climbing poles and fixing electrical issues, earning widespread recognition for her honest work.

Recently, a team was dispatched by the local electricity board to repair a fault line. Kirti left the residents of Janjheli spellbound as she fearlessly ascended steep steel structures, using ropes and wooden supports to repair an electric transformer in the Bagsiad area. Not only did she restore power to the affected area, but she also fixed six transformers following disruptions in the power lines.

Regardless of rain or snowfall, Kirti never shies away from her duties. This resilience has been a defining characteristic throughout her career. Even in her childhood, Kirti, the daugh-

ter of Mani Kumar from Tandri village, would play cricket with the boys, breaking traditional gender boundaries.

Kirti's journey in the electrical trade began after completing her higher secondary education in March 2015. In 2018, she successfully completed a one-year Diploma in Computer and Electronics Trade from Bagsaid ITI. Initially employed as a T-mate, she was eventually offered a regular office job. However, Kirti refused to remain confined to the office, preferring the challenges and rewards of fieldwork. Since August 2019, she has been an integral part of the team, fearlessly taking charge of her responsibilities.

Kirti's competence has surpassed her male colleagues, proving her abilities in fixing both high-tension (HT) and low-tension (LT) lines. Prior to embarking on fieldwork, she ensures her safety by wearing the appropriate protective gear. Ughar Electricity Board's Executive Engineer, Chandramani, emphasized the importance of

providing safety equipment, stating that Kirti's rise to fame and fortune would not go unquestioned without it.

Kirti Thakur has become a symbol of inspiration for others. On Monday, when heavy rains caused five transformers to malfunction in Panchagat Murhag, Kirti single-handedly restored them by skillfully installing jumpers on the HT line fuse in Dalwas and the LT line fuse in Randhar. SDO Janjheli, Narendra Thakur, commended Kirti for her exceptional work, stating that she has become an invaluable asset to the electricity board.

Despite being offered a desk job, Kirti's unwavering determination and dedication to her work have kept her out in the field. Her commitment to her duties has made her a role model for aspiring female electricians and a testament to the power of breaking gender barriers. Kirti Thakur's extraordinary journey serves as a reminder that when given equal opportunities, women can excel in any profession they choose.

HP government raises circuit and rest house charges by 50%

HIMACHALSCAPE DESK
SHIMLA

Seven-month-old Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu-led Congress Government in Himachal Pradesh has implemented a second increase in the charges levied on VVIPs and the general public for various circuit houses and rest houses in the state, raising them by fifty percent.

A notification issued by the State Finance Department, stated that the charges would apply to Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, Ministers, High Court Judges, Members of Parliament, Members of Legislative Assembly, Chairman and Vice Chairman of Boards & Corporations, Government Officers and Employees of Himachal Pradesh, Former Chief Ministers, Former Ministers, Former Members of Parliament, Former Judges of High Court, Former Members of Legislative Assembly, Former Chairman and Vice Chairman, and Retired Government Employees of Himachal Pradesh. Additionally, spouses (husband/wife), children, and parents of the aforementioned dignitaries

would also be subject to the revised charges. The revised rates for circuit houses are set at Rs 600, while for rest houses, it is Rs 500.

Furthermore, central government employees, employees of other state governments and union territories, bank employees, LIC employees posted in Himachal Pradesh (on official duty), editors of national daily newspapers, and press correspondents accredited to the Himachal Pradesh Government, along with Mayors, Deputy Mayors of Municipal Corporations, Presidents, Vice-Presidents of Nagar Parishad, Nagar Panchayats, Gram Panchayats, Members of Zila Parishad, and Block Development Committee (BDC) members (on official visits), as well as other residents of Himachal Pradesh, would also be required to pay the revised charges of Rs 600 for circuit houses and Rs 500 for rest houses.

Non-Himachali guests visiting from outside the state would have to pay Rs 1100 for circuit houses and Rs 1000 for rest houses.