October gross GST collections climb to ₹1.72 lakh crore

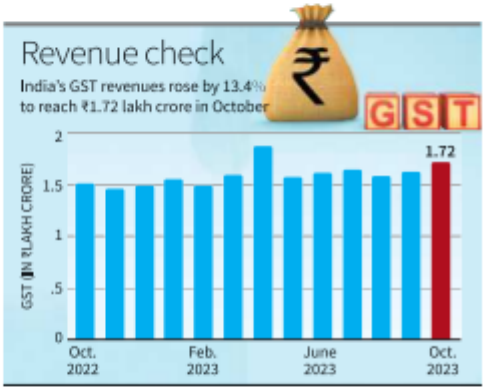
The 13.4% revenue growth marks the sharpest year-on-year uptick since December 2022 and breaks a three-month streak of deceleration

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

Growth in India's gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenues bounced back in October with tax collections rising at a 10-month high pace of 13.4% to hit the second-highest monthly tally of ₹1.72 lakh crore.

October's GST receipts were 5.7% over the kitty in September, when growth in the indirect tax had slowed to a 27-month low of 10.2%. The 13.4% revenue growth marks the sharpest year-on-year uptick since December 2022 and breaks a three-month streak of deceleration.

Domestic transactions and services imports yielded a 13% uptick in October's revenues. The Finance Ministry did not disclose the revenue growth from goods imports. Back of the envelope calculations by *The Hindu* indicate that GST levies on imports of goods rose 13.9% in October, which is faster than the growth from domestic transactions and the highest uptick in at least 9 months. Revenues from goods imports have contracted in four of the last seven months, including September.



GST Compensation Cess collections, which include ₹1,294 crore levied on goods imports, hit a record high of ₹12,456 crore in October. The previous highest collection that will persist till at least March 2026 was ₹12,025 crore received in April.

The Ministry did not share the revenue growth trends among States and union territories that are usually part of its monthly GST revenue statement, in the communique issued on Wednesday. Instead, State GST revenue trends for the first seven months of 2023-24 were shared, including the amounts States were credited from collections of the Integrated GST (IGST). Following such IGST settlements, State GST revenues were up 12% between April and October 2023, with just two States reporting negative growth – Manipur (-19%) and Himachal Pradesh (-2%).

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

Oct. GST collections rise to ₹1.72 lakh crore

"The average gross monthly GST collection in the FY 2023-24 now stands at ₹1.66 lakh crore and is 11% more than that in the same period in the previous financial year," the Ministry said.

Deadline effect

Experts believe October's GST kitty, stemming largely from transactions that took place in September, got a fillip from some festive spending as well as compliance deadlines and steps to curb evasion.

"One of the reasons for this rise is the time barring period for financial year 2017-18. Moreover, the spate of notices and anti-evasion drive have led to substantial collections," said Parag Mehta, partner, indirect tax at N.A. Shah Associates.

ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar said the "higher than anticipated" collections would have got a leg-up from quarter-end adjustments as well as the overall momentum in the economy.

KPMG indirect tax head Abhishek Jain linked the significantly increased collection to settlement of disputes for 2017-18 as the normal period of limitation was ending on September 30. "A mid-year collection of such a high number is definitely worth a cheer and the ongoing festivities driven consumption could help this continue," he said.

GCC identifies areas prone to inundation during monsoon

The initiative is part of the City Disaster Management Plan, and based on the severity of the problem, the locations will be categorised as very high, high, medium, and low vulnerability areas

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

As the monsoon sets in over the city, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has identified locations vulnerable to inundation in each zone as part of the City Disaster Management Plan.

According to data recorded during the 2015 floods, 37 areas were found to have very high vulnerability, with inundation levels reaching over 5 ft, while 84 locations fell under the high vulnerability category, with inundation levels between 3 ft and 5 ft. One area with medium vulnerability and water stagnation level of 2-3 ft was recorded, and 184 areas with low vulnerability, where inundation level was less than 2 ft, was identified. In total, 306 locations were classified.

In 2017, no areas with very high vulnerability or high vulnerability were recorded, while 23 areas with medium vulnerability and 182 areas with low vulnerability were identified, for a round-up of 205 locations.

In 2022, 37 areas prone to inundation were identified by the Greater Chennai Corporation. FILE PHOTO

One area with medium vulnerability and 52 with low vulnerability were recorded in 2018, while 19 and 23 low vulnerability areas were noted in 2019 and 2020 respectively.

The pattern shifted again in 2021, when heavy rain was recorded in November and December, and 18 high vulnerability, 61 medium vulnerability, and 482 low vulnerability spots were identified.

In 2022, 37 areas - one high vulnerability, eight medium vulnerability, and 28 low vulnerability - prone to inundation were identified. The process to identify such areas is on for this year.

Post-flood clean-up

The GCC, in the document, mentioned that the biggest challenge after floodwater recedes was clearing the garbage and sludge from roads.

To handle the garbage, 16,111 sanitary workers and labourers with 675 lorries and 100 earth movers were mobilised from other local bodies.

"The entire team, along with 2,500 workers of the Greater Chennai Corporation, was deployed for cleaning the debris throughout the city on a war footing. Between December 7, 2015 and January 2, 2016, the GCC cleared 2.2 lakh tonnes of garbage and debris i.e., 8,148 tonnes was cleared each day," the civic body stated in the plan.

'Air pollution ups diabetes risk in Chennai, Delhi'

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Two studies published in international journals have reported a worrying link between air pollution levels and the incidence of type 2 diabetes in Chennai and Delhi. The study is notable not because the findings are new – they are not unprecedented – but because they have found that the link, which has been indicated in Western countries and more recently in China as well, also holds in urban India.

Indian cities have consistently dominated the top of lists of places with the worst air for residents, with air quality frequently several times higher than the limits set by the World Health Organization.

The new studies are part of the Centre for cArdiometabolic Risk Reduction in South Asia (CARRS) Surveillance Study. Here, researchers roped in 6,722 adults in Chennai and 5,342 in Delhi and tracked their health through questionnaires and blood samples, with which they checked for fasting plasma glucose (FPG) and glycosylated haemoglobin (HbA1c), at specific intervals from 2010 to 2016.

They also developed air pollution and exposure models, among others.

Status quo: Indian cities have consistently dominated the tops of lists of places with the worst air for residents. FILE PHOTO

Based on their findings, the researchers reported that 10μg/m3 (micrograms per cubic metre air) difference "in annual average PM2.5" could be related to a 9-36% higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes. They have interpreted the long-term follow-up of study participants to mean that the link between type 2 diabetes and air pollution is "not due to intermittent episodes of high pollution levels" but "long-term exposure to ambient PM2.5".

They also reported that for every 10μg/m3 increase a month in PM2.5 levels, FPG increased by 0.21-0.58 mg/dL (milligrams per decilitre) and HbA1c by 0.012-0.024 in Delhi, and FPG increased −0.36-1.39 mg/dL and HbA1c 0.01-0.06 in Chennai. Over six months, a 10μg/m3 change in PM2.5 levels resulted in a rough doubling of both ranges in Delhi, but couldn't be associated with a statistically significant result in Chennai.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

Pollution ups diabetes risk in Delhi, Chennai

The paper published in *BMJ Open Diabetes Research & Care* also said that "hypertensive participants... were more susceptible to developing type 2 diabetes against long-term exposure to PM 2.5 in Chennai," whereas "younger participants were more susceptible to developing [the disease] in Delhi". There is some epidemiological wisdom as to how ambient PM2.5 concentrations 'outside' the body can affect processes 'inside'. For example, one 2016 study in mice reported that "short-term exposure to PM2.5 induces vascular insulin resistance and inflammation triggered by a mechanism involving pulmonary oxidative stress".

A commentary accompanying the publication of this paper noted that "any other condition involving oxidative stress may increase the susceptibility to harm from PM 2.5".

The other paper, published in the journal *Hypertension*, stated that the "data strongly support a temporal association between high levels of ambient air pollution, higher systolic blood pressure, and incident hypertension".

Malware malice

Repeated allegations of spyware use need thorough, independent probe

In a thriving democracy, the Opposition and the press are vital components of a structure controlled by a ruling establishment that requires accountability for it to be effective. That over a dozen Opposition leaders and journalists received email alerts from Apple that their devices were targeted by "state-sponsored attackers" suggests that this could be a repeat of what these members of the first and fourth estate went through in the Pegasus episode recently. In early 2022, an article in *The New York Times* detailed how Pegasus, a spyware developed by the Israel-based NSO Group, was used as a tool to advance Israeli interests, as Tel Aviv offered it to other countries which used it against Opposition leaders, journalists and dissidents. In July 2021, a reporters' consortium, the Pegasus Project, found that at least 40 journalists, cabinet Ministers and other officials in India were possibly subject to surveillance using Pegasus software. A Supreme Court of India panel, however, found no conclusive evidence of the spyware on the 29 phones that it had examined; but the apex court also noted, tellingly, that the Union government was not cooperating with the panel. Unlike the Indian government's lackadaisical and dismissive approach towards the NSO group and its products – which *The NYT* reported as allegedly bought by the Indian government from Israel as part of a $2 billion package including sophisticated weapons and intelligence gear in 2017 – other governments in the West implemented stringent steps following the disclosures on spyware use.

Apple's iPhones are used by nearly 20% of smartphone users worldwide, and by nearly 7% of such users in India, largely for their diverse facilities and robust security provisions. Researchers had found that spyware software such as Pegasus had targeted iPhones and the operating system iOS as early as 2016, and Apple had come up with updates to fix Pegasus exploits, besides going on to sue NSO. The company clarified that the alerts sent now did not accuse a "specific state actor"; it also said that it would not be able to disclose how the targets were discovered, but reiterated that the alerts had to be taken seriously. Yet, with the specific targets being Opposition leaders and journalists, the question whether it is the ruling establishment that is subjecting them to surveillance is important. This can only be verified by an independent and empowered investigation, involving the apex court again, which should, this time around, compel the Union government to cooperate. More immediately, the government must come clean on its dealings with NSO and its use of software provided by such agencies and also emulate steps taken by other governments in proscribing such entities.

Author Nandini Das wins 2023 British Academy Book Prize

Press Trust of India
LONDON


Nandini Das

Indian-born author Nandini Das has been named the winner of the 2023 British Academy Book Prize for Global Cultural Understanding, a leading international non-fiction award with a prize money of £25,000, for her book *Courting India: England, Mughal India and the Origins of Empire*. The U.K.-based academic's debut work, described as the "true origin story of Britain and India told through England's first diplomatic mission to the Mughal courts", was revealed as this year's winner at a ceremony at the British Academy in London on Tuesday evening.

As a Professor in the English faculty at the University of Oxford, the 49-year-old author has sought to present a new perspective on the origins of empire through the story of the arrival of the first English ambassador in India, Sir Thomas Roe, in the early 17th century.

"By using contemporary sources by Indian and British political figures, officials and merchants, she has given the story an unparalleled immediacy that brings to life these early encounters and the misunderstandings that sometimes threatened to wreck the whole endeavour," said Professor Charles Tripp, Chair of the prize jury. He described how, through her beautiful writing and exceptional research, the jury was drawn to the contrast between an impoverished, insecure Britain and the flourishing, confident Mughal Empire.

The British Academy Book Prize, formerly known as the Nayef Al-Rodhan Prize, was established in 2013 to reward and celebrate the best works of non-fiction that demonstrate rigour.

Ms. Das will receive £25,000 for winning the prize and each of the shortlisted works, including *Black Ghost of Empire: The Long Death of Slavery and the Failure of Emancipation* by Caribbean-born Kris Manjapra, will receive £1,000 each.

53 accidents, 19 deaths per hour in road crashes in 2022, says Ministry

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

The expansion of the country's road network, including expressways, and an increase in vehicle ownership continue to spur a rise in number of fatalities due to road accidents, with the severity of crashes worsening significantly over the past decade, according to government data.

India witnessed 53 accidents and 19 deaths every hour, or an average of 1,264 accidents and 42 deaths, daily in road crashes last year, according to a Ministry of Road Transport and Highways report released on Wednesday. There were a total 4,61,312 road accidents across the country, which claimed as many as 1,68,491 lives. The number of road accidents in 2022 increased by 11.9% and deaths rose by 9.4%.

The severity of road crashes, measured by the number of people killed per 100 accidents, has increased over the past decade from 28.2 in 2012 to 36.5 in 2022, with a consistent increase every year. In 2020 and 2021, however, when road crashes and deaths registered an absolute decline due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the severity rate had spiked above 37.

The increasing severity "underscores the need for improved trauma care and traffic calming measures aimed at reducing crash impact parameters", notes the government report.

According to an analysis by the Save Life Foundation, with a crash severity of 38.15, India ranks among the 20 worst countries for road crashes. According to World Road Statistics, 2022 published by the International Road Federation, Geneva, which uses data for the year 2020 in terms of the total number of fatalities, India was followed by China (with a crash severity of 25.22) and the U.S. (with a crash severity of 2.01).

National and State highways, which account for only 4.9% of the total road network, witnessed 56.1% of all road crashes and almost 61% of all road crash fatalities in the country.

Of the factors causing road accidents, "speeding" was the most common. It accounted for 72.3% of accidents and 71.2% of deaths. Uttar Pradesh registered the highest share of deaths at 13.4%. This was followed by Tamil Nadu at 10.6% and Maharashtra at 9%.

An age-wise breakdown of road crash data shows that most of those who died were in the 18-45 age bracket. However, 9,528 children were also killed due to road crashes in 2022.

Brakes off

Road accident fatalities have increased over the past decade, as per the Road Accidents in India 2022 report

Year	No. of road accidents	Fatalities	Severity*
2018	4.7 lakh	1.57 lakh	32.4
2019	4.56 lakh	1.58 lakh	34.8
2020	3.72 lakh	1.38 lakh	37.2
2021	4.12 lakh	1.53 lakh	37.3
2022	4.61 lakh	1.68 lakh	36.5

*Number of persons killed per 100 accidents