

Pre-test for Census first phase to be held from November 10

Vijaita Singh

NEW DELHI

The pre-test for the first phase of Census 2027 will be conducted from November 10 to 30 in selected sample areas of all States and Union Territories, the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India said in a notification on Thursday.

The option to self-enumerate will be available from November 1 to 7, the notification added.

This implies that the methodology on caste enumeration has not been finalised yet as, unlike the previous instances, the pre-test for only the first phase – Houselisting and Housing Census – has been notified on Thursday.

In 2019, the questions to be asked in both phases – the Housing Census and Population Enumeration, and the National Population Register (NPR) – were tested in succession from August 12 to September 30.

Testing efficacy

Pre-test is required to test the efficacy of the entire exercise that will be held in two phases, with the Housing Census and Population Enumeration scheduled

The option to self-enumerate for the Census will be available from November 1-7

from April 1, 2026 to February 28, 2027.

This will be the first digital Census, and the first to enumerate caste in independent India.

The test will evaluate the proposed questions, data collection methodologies, training effectiveness, logistics, printing processes, data quality assessment, and identify potential field issues, among others.

The Hindu reported on July 9 that in the pre-test exercise for Census 2027 only questions pertaining to household amenities in the Housing Census phase will be asked.

This is the first Census since 2011 as the exercise that was scheduled in 2021 was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It will now be completed in 2027.

The pre-test for the planned 2021 Census took place in 2019, covering more than 26 lakh people in 76 districts of 36 States and Union Territories.

Russia backs AMCA, offers to make Su-57 jets in India

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Russia reaffirmed its commitment to deepen defence cooperation with India with its Ambassador Denis Alipov expressing his country's readiness to support India's Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) programme through "local production" of the Su-57 fifth-generation fighter jet.

Speaking at an event on Thursday, Mr. Alipov said the move underscores the long-standing strategic partnership between the two nations, which has evolved far beyond a traditional buyer-seller relationship into one of joint development, co-production, and full technology sharing. He also said that both sides are exploring collaborations in next-generation technologies.

The announcement comes amid growing speculation about the future of the India-Russia oil trade, following U.S. President Donald Trump's claim that India would soon halt such purchases.

However, the Ambassador said that "Russian energy remains the most cost-effective option on the global market".

Russia offers to make Su-57 jets in India

He said that "Russia has consistently honoured its commitments while showing flexibility in developing alternative logistics and payment systems in the face of attempts to disrupt this cooperation."

On the defence ties with India, he said: "For over six decades, Russia has been a trusted defence partner and a key contributor to India's military modernisation, with nearly 70% of India's defence equipment of Russian origin, and a testament to its effectiveness has (been) demonstrated by Operation Sindoor. The partnership has produced several landmark achievements, most notably the joint production of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, which is now being upgraded to a hypersonic version."

Mr. Alipov said that both sides are exploring collaborations in next-generation technologies, including anti-drone systems, advanced radar solutions, and precision strike capabilities.

India's technical mission in Kabul will be embassy soon, says MEA

SHUBHAJIT ROY

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 16

INDIA SAID on Thursday that its “technical mission” in Kabul will transition into an embassy in the “next few days”.

Last week, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had told Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi that India will reopen the embassy.

When asked about the upgrade of the Indian Mission in Kabul, Ministry of External Affairs' official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, “Our technical mission has been operational in Kabul since June 2022. Its transition to an Embassy will

happen in the next few days.”

On the Pakistan-Afghanistan clashes, he said India remains fully committed to the latter's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence.

“We are closely monitoring the situation. Three things are clear – one, that Pakistan hosts terrorist organisations and sponsors terrorist activities; two, it is an old practice of Pakistan to blame its neighbours for its own internal failures; and three, Pakistan is infuriated with Afghanistan exercising sovereignty over its own territories. India remains fully committed to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of Afghanistan,” the MEA

spokesperson said at a press conference.

On October 10, as a first step towards normalising diplomatic ties with the Taliban since the group seized power in Afghanistan in 2021, India said it would upgrade its “technical mission” in Kabul to the status of an embassy.

Afghanistan said it would send diplomats to India as part of step-by-step efforts to improve bilateral relations.

India closed its embassy in Kabul after the Taliban seized power in August 2021. In June 2022, India re-established its diplomatic presence in the Afghan capital by deploying a “technical team”.

India to expand trade agreement with 4-nation South American bloc

MUKESH JAGOTA

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 16

INDIA AND the South American trade bloc MERCOSUR have decided to expand their existing Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) and conclude the negotiations within a year of launch.

"The expansion of the agreement should be substantial, aiming for a significant share of bilateral trade to benefit from tariff preferences. The expansion of the agreement should cover

both tariff and non-tariff issues related to trade and economic partnership," India-Brazil Joint Declaration for Deepening of Mercosur-India Trade Agreement said.

MERCOSUR includes Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Guyana, and Suriname of the trade bloc.

To get the exercise going both sides will set up a technical dialogue and hold a meeting of the Joint Administration Committee created under the existing PTA



Union minister Piyush Goyal with Brazil Vice President Geraldo Alckmin in New Delhi on Thursday. PTI

at the earliest to define the scope of the expansion.

"Parties should endeavour to conclude the negotiations within one year from the launch of negotiations," the joint declaration said. The declaration for Deepening of MERCOSUR-India Trade Agreement was issued after the meeting on Thursday in New Delhi between the Vice President of Brazil and Minister of Development, Industry, Trade and Services, Geraldo Alckmin, and commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal.

It was also decided to involve the private sector and other stakeholders to support the negotiation process.

"In addition, the Brazilian side indicated that it will work in a coordinated manner with its MERCOSUR partners towards a substantial, swift, and mutually beneficial deepening of the Agreement," the declaration added.

The existing PTA between India and MERCOSUR was signed in January 2004 and became operational in June 2009.

The agreement gives tariff concessions of 10% to 100% on 450 products from India and 452 products from MERCOSUR.

The bilateral trade between India and MERCOSUR stood at \$ 17.9 billion in 2024-25 with India's exports at \$ 8.19 billion and imports at \$ 9.73 billion.

Brazil is the biggest trading partner on the bloc with India's exports at \$ 6.77 billion and imports of \$ 5.43 billion. India's exports to Argentina were \$1.01 billion and imports were at \$3.73 billion.

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India in active talks for trade pact with U.S., EU, Oman: Goyal

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

India has implemented a number of free trade agreements with developed nations and is in active dialogue for such pacts with nations including the U.S., Oman, and the EU, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.

India has implemented trade pacts with Australia, the UAE and EFTA bloc. It has also signed an agreement with the U.K.

“We have done free trade agreements (FTAs) with many developed countries in the last three years... We are in active dialogue with the U.S., EU, Chile, Peru, New Zealand, and Oman,” the Minister told reporters here.

“It clearly shows that In-

dia is the favoured and preferred destination both for investment and for bilateral trade,” he added.

Pact with Brazil

Mr. Goyal also said with Brazil also, he has discussed expanding preferential trade agreement from its current level so that “we can” in the future penetrate the South American market in a bigger way.

The Indian official team is in Washington now to hold trade talks with U.S. counterparts. The team will be there till October 17. In February, leaders of India and the U.S. asked officials to negotiate a Bilateral Trade Agreement. They fixed a deadline to conclude the first tranche of the pact by the fall (October-November) of 2025.

Next formal round of India-EU FTA talks not set, says Agrawal

Issues pertaining to market access, regulatory cooperation, agricultural sensitivities need constant discussion before formal negotiations

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

NEW DELHI

Negotiations on the free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union are facing issues relating to market access, regulatory cooperation and agricultural sensitivities, *The Hindu* has learnt.

Separately, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said that the next formal round of negotiations has not been announced as the nature of these issues are such that they require constant discussion rather than waiting for a formal round.

The 14th and latest round of negotiations was held on October 6-10 in Brussels. Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal, and his counterparts in Europe, have regu-



Talking terms: The Commerce Secretary said both sides will continue to interact with each other to resolve their differences. PTI

larly reiterated their commitment to completing negotiations on the trade deal by the end of this calendar year.

“India-EU FTA negotiations are progressing very well,” Mr. Agrawal said at a press conference.

“We are in the last leg of negotiations. The last was the most arduous leg of negotiations because the toughest things are decided at the end. We are in

that stage of negotiations. The last round saw real progress.”

Mr. Agrawal added that the teams from both sides would continue interacting with each other to work out their differences.

“Right now, we have not settled on the next round of official negotiations because we feel there are issues across areas that we need to resolve on a continuous basis,” he said.

Trump and MEA at odds over Russian oil imports

Trump claims Modi gave commitment to stop buying oil from Russia 'soon'; Ministry denies the leaders discussed the issue, but says govt. is 'broad-basing' and 'diversifying' its energy sources

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

India and the United States continued to differ publicly over Russian oil as U.S. President Donald Trump said he had been assured by Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India will stop buying oil from Russia, while the Ministry of External Affairs maintained the two leaders had not spoken about the issue.

However, the MEA said that India was "broad-basing" and "diversifying" its sources of energy according to market needs, and did not specifically deny the claim that it was reducing its intake.

Bone of contention

The subject of Russian oil, which has led to the U.S. imposing penalty tariffs on India, is also believed to be holding up trade talks between the two countries. While the government has consistently denied it would bow to pressure, data analysed by *The Hindu* showed that oil public sector undertakings have dropped their Russian imports by as much as 45% between June and September this year, even though

Trump vs MEA

India and the U.S. have been at loggerheads over the former's purchase of Russian oil, and New Delhi has consistently denied it will bow to pressure



- Trump says Modi committed on Oct. 15 to **ending Russian oil imports soon**

- MEA says there was **no conversation between leaders that day**, no reference to Russian oil in Oct. 9 call too

MEA on Oct. 16 says priority is to protect interests of Indians, broad-basing energy sources

- U.S. Ambassador-designate to India Sergio Gor met Modi on Oct. 11 and later Trump on Oct. 15; However, it is **unclear if he conveyed India's message**



I was not happy that India was buying oil, and [PM Modi] assured me today that they will not be buying oil from Russia. That's a big step. Now we're going to get China to do the same thing... He [Mr. Modi] loves Trump... I don't want to destroy his political career

DONALD TRUMP, U.S. President

Russia remains India's biggest supplier overall.

"I am not aware of any conversation yesterday between the two leaders," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told reporters here on Thursday, also clarifying that a call between Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump last Thursday had

only dealt with the Gaza peace plan and India-U.S. trade issues.

On Wednesday, Mr. Trump had said he was confident that India would end its oil imports "soon" but not "immediately".

CONTINUED ON

» **PAGE 14**

Modi outsourced key decisions to the U.S.: Congress

NEW DELHI

Amid the India-U.S. exchange over Russian oil, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said Prime Minister Modi is "frightened" of U.S. President Donald Trump. In a post on X, he also said, "[Modi] allows Trump to decide and announce that India will not buy Russian oil. Keeps sending congratulatory messages despite repeated snubs... Skipped Sharm el-Sheikh. Doesn't contradict him on Operation Sindoor." » **PAGE 14**

China defends oil purchase, slams U.S. for 'bullying'

BEIJING

China on Thursday said that its purchases of Russian oil were "legitimate" and decried recent "unilateral bullying" measures by the U.S. as the trade row between the two countries continues to intensify. The reaction follows U.S. President Donald Trump's remarks that India promised to stop buying Russian oil, and he would get China to follow suit. » **PAGE 18**

Trump and MEA at odds over Russian oil imports

“I was not happy that India was buying oil, and [PM Modi] assured me today that they will not be buying oil from Russia,” Mr. Trump told reporters at the White House, with U.S. Ambassador-designate to Delhi Sergio Gor also present. “It’s a little bit of a process, but the process is going to be over with soon,” Mr. Trump said, adding, “That’s a big step. Now we’re going to get China to do the same thing.” On Thursday, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs slammed the U.S. for “unilateral bullying” over its “legitimate” imports from Russia.

Going on to praise Mr. Modi as a “great man” who “loves Trump”, Mr. Trump said he did not want to “destroy [Mr. Modi’s] political career”. “I’ve watched India for years. It’s an incredible country, and every single year you’d have a new leader,” Mr. Trump said, adding: “My friend has been there now for a long time.”

The MEA declined to comment on whether Mr. Gor had discussed the issue with Mr. Modi. In a statement issued on Thursday, a few hours after Mr. Trump’s controversial comments, the MEA sought to clarify its position. While it did not specifically mention Russian oil, it said it was seeking to “expand” energy procurement from the U.S.

The MEA was more direct on its response to U.K. sanctions on Nayara, an Indian refiner owned by Russian oil major Rosneft.

“India does not subscribe to any unilateral sanctions... There should be no double standards, especially when it comes to energy trade,” Mr. Jaiswal said.

China defends buying Russian oil, slams U.S. for ‘unilateral bullying’

Agence France-Presse
BEIJING

China said on Thursday that its purchases of Russian oil were “legitimate” and decried recent “unilateral bullying” measures by the United States as the trade row between the two countries continues to intensify.

Mr. Trump said on Wednesday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised him New Delhi would stop buying Russian oil, and that he would get

China to follow suit.

Mr. Trump has accused both China and India of funding the three-year Ukraine war through the purchases, and has also demanded that European allies immediately stop buying oil from Russia.

Asked about Mr. Trump’s intention to pressure China, Beijing’s Foreign Ministry defended its “normal, legitimate economic, trade, and energy cooperation with countries around the world, including Russia”.

Trump plans to meet Putin in Budapest after 'great progress' in call; date to be set

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said he would meet Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Budapest after making "great progress" in a call on Thursday, just a day before Ukraine's leader is due at the White House to push for U.S.-made Tomahawk missiles.

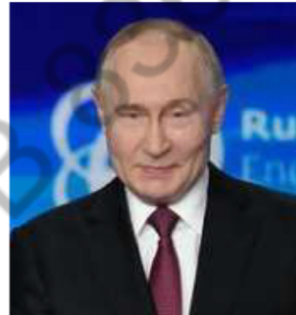
Mr. Trump did not give a date for the meeting in the Hungarian capital, which would be his second with Mr. Putin since returning to office. The pair met in Alaska in August without a

breakthrough on ending Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"I believe great progress was made with today's telephone conversation," Mr. Trump said on his Truth Social network.

Mr. Trump said he and Mr. Putin would "meet in an agreed upon location, Budapest, Hungary, to see if we can bring this 'inglorious' War, between Russia and Ukraine, to an end."

Top United States and Russian officials including U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio would hold "initial meetings" next week



Vladimir Putin

in an as yet to be decided location, Mr. Trump added.

Mr. Trump's comments represented the latest wild swing in his relations with Mr. Putin, after he recently

expressed growing frustration with the Kremlin leader over his refusal to reach a peace deal.

There was no immediate reaction from the Kremlin – or from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is due to meet Mr. Trump on Friday to push him to increase pressure on Mr. Putin.

With the war now in its fourth year, Russia launched fresh attacks on energy facilities in eastern Ukraine, repeating the pattern of focusing on Kyiv's power network that it has followed every winter.

Ceasefire halts deadly fighting on Afghanistan-Pakistan border

The 48-hour ceasefire was aimed at allowing time to 'find a positive solution through constructive dialogue', according to Islamabad; shops reopen in Spin Boldak as residents return home; UN rights chief Turk praises the truce's implementation

Agence France-Presse
SPIN BOLDAK

A ceasefire along the frontier between Afghanistan and Pakistan was holding on Thursday, officials on both sides said, after dozens of troops and civilians were killed in cross-border clashes.

In Spin Boldak, a focal point of recent clashes on the Afghan side, an AFP journalist saw shops reopening and residents returning to homes they had fled during the fighting.

The 48-hour ceasefire was aimed at allowing time to "find a positive solution... through constructive dialogue", according



Final prayers: Relatives of victims of the cross-border clashes offer prayers during a funeral ceremony in Spin Boldak on Thursday. AFP

to Islamabad. Pakistan is facing a resurgence of attacks against its security forces on its border with Afghanistan, led by the Pakistani Taliban and its affiliates.

Forty civilians were killed and 170 others wounded on Wednesday, according to Spin Boldak's director of public health Karimullah Zubair Agha.

The UN Assistance Mis-

sion in Afghanistan (UNAMA) earlier reported at least 18 civilians killed and more than 350 wounded in the violence.

Hundreds of residents and Taliban officials attended the funeral of seven members of the same family in Spin Boldak.

Islamabad accuses Kabul of offering safe haven to militants who plan their frequent assaults from Afghanistan soil – a charge the Taliban regime denies.

Pakistani officials on the northern and southern border with Afghanistan said on Thursday that "no violence was reported overnight, and the ceasefire remains in effect".

A senior security official

in Peshawar said: "Additional paramilitary troops have been deployed to counter potential... militant activity that could jeopardise the ceasefire."

Shortly before the truce was announced, blasts were reported in the capital Kabul and the southern province of Kandahar province, where the Afghan Taliban's shadowy supreme leader lives. At least five people were killed and 35 wounded in Wednesday's explosions in Kabul.

United Nations rights chief Volker Turk welcomed the ceasefire and appealed to "both parties to prevent any further harm to civilians and commit to a lasting ceasefire".

Govt clears decks to let Adani plant for Bangladesh link to India grid

After Dhaka regime change, group had made case for catering to India demand

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 16

THE CENTRE has granted approval to Adani Power Limited (APL), a large thermal power producer, to lay an overhead transmission line to connect its Godda Ultra Super Critical Thermal Power Plant with the Indian grid through a Line-In Line-Out (LILO) arrangement of the Kahalgaon A–Maithon B 400 KV line. As of now, the Godda plant supplies electricity exclusively to Bangladesh.

For laying the proposed transmission line, which will pass through 56 villages of two tehsils — Godda and Poreyahat — in Godda district of Jharkhand, the Centre has conferred the same powers to the APL, which the telegraph authority possesses under the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, for placing telegraph lines and posts. Under the Act, the authority can, from time to time, place and maintain a telegraph line under, over, along or across, and posts in or upon, any immovable property.

The Ministry of Power extended similar authority to APL by issuing an order on September 29 using powers under Section 164 of the Electricity Act, 2003.

The Ministry's order comes in the wake of multiple, and unprecedented, amendments to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

TIMELINE

AUGUST 6, 2024: Adani pitches for Godda plant, which provides power to Bangladesh, to be allowed to cater to demand in India.

AUGUST 10, 2024: Power ministry says "in view of emerging geo-political situation in Bangladesh", standby connectivity may be granted to Godda plant.

AUGUST 12, 2024: Power Ministry amends Guidelines for Import/Export (Cross Border) of Electricity, 2018, making way for connecting APL's Godda plant to Indian Grid, facilitating sale of power

AUGUST 14, 2024: CEA amends procedures, allowing government to permit connecting generating stations to Indian Grid

DECEMBER, 2024: CERC amends rules to facilitate standby connectivity to Godda plant

● Adani plant

regulations to enable this transmission connectivity to the APL's Godda plant. This includes the ministry's move to amend the guidelines for import and export of electricity, the Central Electricity Authority's (CEA) move to amend procedure for facilitating cross border flows and the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission's (CERC) move to amend the General Network Access regulations for Inter-State Transmission System (ISTS) and, separately, its regulations governing cross border trade.

The Ministry of Power and APL did not respond to emails seeking comments.

APL's Godda power plant, which was declared as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) by the Central Government in March 2019, supplies electricity exclusively to Bangladesh. However, after a regime change in Dhaka in August last year, the government had allowed as an interim arrangement to connect the Godda plant with ISTS, a high-voltage network in India that transmits electricity across state borders, enabling power flow from surplus regions to areas with deficits and ensuring grid stability. The ISTS is operated by Central Transmission Utility of India Ltd (CTUIL). The Centre's decision will enable the APL to sell power to domestic discoms.

In fact, APL, earlier called Adani Power Jharkhand Ltd, wrote to the Ministry of Power on August 6, 2024, a day after the ouster of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5. In the letter, it informed the government that "given the sustained increase in power demand across India, it would be beneficial if their generating station could cater to such demand in India, when the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) is not scheduling

power from the plant on account of low demand, any default under PPA or any geo-political issue." The matter was deliberated at the Ministry of Power on August 10 last year under the chairpersonship of Power Secretary, wherein it was decided that in order to accelerate the DTL [Diode-Transistor Logic] implementation process, CTUIL may provide APJL with standby ISTS Connectivity details, including the relevant ISTS substation, based on the amended Central Government Guidelines for Import/Export (Cross Border) of Electricity (IECBE), as per the sources

At that time, it was also highlighted that "consequential amendments" would be carried out by CERC in its Regulations. This was needed to enable the scheduling of power from APJL's generation based on available margin in ISTS.

The latest approval by the Power Ministry is granted for 25 years. APL will have to seek the consent of local bodies, Railways, National Highways, State Highways etc. before erection of the proposed line, and operate it after receiving approval from the Centre's electrical inspector, the order said. It is also subject to compliance of the requirements of the provisions of the Electricity Act, 2003. APL will also have to submit clearances to the Central Electricity Authority after obtaining the same from Civil Aviation, Defense etc.

"In case, the route of above overhead lines (or some portion of the route of above overhead line) falls in the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) area, the applicant has to comply with the orders of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the petition No.838 of 2019 regarding Great Indian Bustard (GIB) case, and the directions of the technical/expert committee constituted by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in this regard," it said.

Google's new AI finds promising approach for cancer treatment

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Opening a portal to a new approach to drug discovery, Google unveiled a family of artificial intelligence tools that proposed a drug combination for detecting cancer that human experts did not know about, which seemed effective in laboratory conditions.

This is a rare instance of AI being used in the process of scientific discovery to design practical drug candidates.

The Cell2Sentence-Scale 27B (C2S-Scale) is a 27-billion-parameter foundation model designed to understand the language of individual cells. "This announcement marks a milestone for AI in science," Shekoofeh Azizi and Brian Perozzi, staff scientists at Google DeepMind and Google Research, respectively, said in a blogpost, adding,



The problem that researchers set out to solve was how to detect an emerging tumour.

"C2S-Scale generated a novel hypothesis about cancer cellular behaviour and we have since confirmed its prediction with experimental validation in living cells. This discovery reveals a promising new pathway for developing therapies to fight cancer."

Their research paper, with the scientific details, was made available for public scrutiny at bioRxiv, a repository of pre-prints.

The problem that researchers set out to solve was how to detect an

emerging tumour when the immune system itself was unaware of it. A strategy was to force such nascent tumours to display immune-triggering signals through a process called antigen presentation.

The C2S-Scale 27B model was given a task: find a drug that boosts immune signals only if low levels of interferon are present. Interferons are proteins produced by the body and act as frontline defenders against infections and tumours. This is a situation that exists when a tumour is likely secretly growing while avoiding the body's natural threat detection system. Small AI, or Large Language Models were unable to learn this. By exposing the 27-billion parameter model to two large data sets – real-world patient samples with tumour-immune interactions plus low-level interferon signalling and cell-line data with

no immune context – the scientists trod upon insight.

They first simulated the effect of over 4,000 drugs and noted how many of them worked in situations where interferon levels were low even as the tumours grew. Out of the many drug candidates highlighted by the model, a fraction (10%-30%) of drug hits are already known in prior literature, while the remaining drugs were "surprising hits with no prior known link". The model zeroed in on a chemical drug called silmitasertib that only seemed to boost the immune system when it suspected a tumour.

"With more pre-clinical and clinical tests, this discovery may reveal a promising new pathway for developing therapies to fight cancer," Sundar Pichai, CEO, Google and Alphabet, posted on X on Thursday.