VISTAR for 2026

Mains: *GSIII – Indian Economy*

Why in News?

Recently the Union Cabinet approved VISTAR (Viksit Bharat Initiative for Statistical Transformation, Analytics & Research) for 2026–27 to 2030–31.

What is VISTAR?

- **VISTAR** – It is an initiative to transform India's statistical architecture by moving beyond periodic surveys and fragmented administrative records.
- **Integrates** – Conventional surveys with alternative datasets, digital platforms and AI-driven analytical tools.
- **Objective** – To develop a dynamic, interoperable and technology-driven statistical system.

How is VISTAR Different from the Traditional Statistical System?

- **Traditional Statistical System –Relied primarily on periodic sample surveys, Census exercises and administrative records.**
    - Institutions such as NSO, CSO and NSSO generated national accounts, employment, consumption and industrial production data.
    - Faced limitations in capturing rapid structural changes, particularly in services, digital businesses and the informal economy.
- **VISTAR Approach** –
    - Combines conventional surveys with mobile-phone, scanner and e-commerce data.
    - Uses AI and Machine Learning for data processing, validation and analysis.
    - Promotes continuous data collection, interoperability and district-level statistical estimates.
    - MoSPI proposes conducting 59 surveys during the 16th Finance Commission cycle, compared to 43 major surveys in the previous cycle.

What are the Major Transformation Pillars?

- **Integration of Alternative Data Sources** – Supplements conventional surveys with mobile-phone records, scanner data and e-commerce transactions.
    - Reduces respondent burden and improves the frequency of statistical

information.

- **End-to-End Digitalisation** – Expands computer-assisted surveys and digital platforms to improve data collection, processing and accessibility.
    - Builds upon existing initiatives such as the e-SIGMA platform.
- **Strengthening State and District Statistics** – Provides financial and technical assistance to States and UTs through measurable, outcome-linked support.
    - Improves district-level estimates of employment, household consumption and unincorporated enterprises through PLFS, HCES and ASUSE.
    - Supports State and district GDP estimates and State-level Index of Industrial Production.
- **Eighth Economic Census** – Covers non-farm establishments and their workers up to Gram Panchayat and municipal ward levels.
    - Provides the foundation for a National Statistical Business Register (SBR) to identify enterprises, particularly in the unorganised sector.
- **AI and Methodological Research** – Integrates AI and Machine Learning for statistical validation, processing and analytical improvements.
    - Promotes research to improve statistical methodologies and data reliability.

What is the Significance of VISTAR?

- **Evidence-Based Policymaking** – Reliable and timely data improve policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation of government programmes.
- **Regional Development** – District-level employment and consumption estimates reveal regional disparities hidden by national averages.
- **Better Welfare Targeting** – Granular household and enterprise data improve identification of beneficiaries and allocation of public resources.
- **Informal Economy Measurement** – Comprehensive business data improve estimates of the contribution of unorganised enterprises to GDP.
- **Investment and Credit Planning** – Reliable enterprise databases support credit policies, infrastructure planning and investment decisions.
- **Data Interoperability** – Harmonised definitions, cataloguing and machine-readable formats reduce duplication and inconsistencies across databases.
- **Viksit Bharat @2047** – A robust statistical foundation helps assess economic progress and identify emerging development challenges.

What are the Major Implementation Challenges?

- **Data Representativeness** – Mobile-phone and e-commerce datasets may disproportionately capture digitally connected consumers and formal businesses.
    - Selection bias can distort estimates if alternative datasets are not statistically representative.
- **Centre-State Coordination** – Database integration requires common definitions, classifications and reliable data-sharing protocols.
    - Uneven state-level infrastructure, manpower and technical capabilities may undermine comparability.
- **Privacy and Cybersecurity** – Greater dependence on digital information raises concerns regarding confidentiality, identity protection and cybersecurity.

- **AI-Related Risks** – Algorithmic bias, automated errors and inadequate transparency can compromise statistical reliability.
    - Synthetic data may reproduce patterns and relationships without reflecting actual observations.
- **Institutional Independence** – Statistical agencies require professional autonomy, independent validation and accountability to maintain public credibility.
- **Capacity Constraints** – Financial assistance must translate into trained statisticians, robust field infrastructure and stronger institutional capabilities.

What is the Way Forward?

- **Maintain Statistical Authenticity** – Alternative datasets must supplement, not replace, scientifically designed surveys and ground-level verification.
- **Strengthen Data Governance** – Establish common standards, interoperability protocols and secure data-sharing mechanisms across governments.
- **Ensure Privacy Protection** – Adopt robust anonymisation, confidentiality and cybersecurity safeguards.
- **Independent Validation** – Subject AI-generated estimates and statistical models to transparent scrutiny and professional verification.
- **Build Institutional Capacity** – Invest in trained personnel, modern infrastructure and state-level statistical institutions.
- **Preserve Autonomy** – Ensure professional independence of statistical agencies to maintain credibility and public trust.

What lies ahead?

- VISTAR represents an important transition towards a continuous, interconnected and technology-driven statistical ecosystem.
- Its success will depend not merely on technological sophistication but also on data quality, institutional coordination and statistical independence.

Reference

The Hindu| VISTAR: India's shift towards a real-time, technology-driven statistical system

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