

WELCOME 2026

As the clock strikes midnight and 2025 passes into history, we stand at the threshold of 2026—a year brimming with possibilities, aspirations, and renewed determination. Each New Year is more than a change in the calendar; it is an opportunity to reflect, reset, and redirect our energies toward growth, progress, and the well-being of society.

The past year has taught us valuable lessons in resilience, patience, and adaptability. While challenges tested our resolve, they also strengthened our spirit. In 2026, it is time to embrace these lessons and channel them into positive action, both personally and collectively. Whether it is in education, health, technology, or social harmony, the new year invites us to contribute to a better, brighter world.

For individuals, 2026 represents a fresh canvas. It is a chance to set meaningful goals, nurture talents, and cultivate habits that promote health, happiness, and personal growth.

It is also a reminder to value time, relationships, and experiences that enrich life beyond material achievements. Small steps—be it learning a new skill, dedicating time to family, or helping those in need—can bring lasting fulfillment and joy.

On a societal level, 2026 calls for renewed commitment to nation-building and community development. Encouraging youth to engage in constructive activities, supporting education, and participating in social welfare initiatives can shape a generation that is responsible, compassionate, and forward-thinking.

It is a year to reinforce ethical values, celebrate diversity, and work toward inclusivity in all spheres of life.

Economically and technologically, 2026 presents opportunities to innovate, collaborate, and create sustainable solutions.

With rapid advancements in digital technology, renewable energy, and infrastructure development, the year holds promise for enhanced connectivity, productivity, and global engagement. Embracing these opportunities responsibly will allow individuals, businesses, and governments to achieve growth that is both progressive and equitable.

Spiritually and emotionally, the New Year reminds us of the importance of gratitude, empathy, and kindness. Recognizing the efforts of those who make a difference in our lives, supporting the vulnerable, and fostering a sense of unity can create a society that thrives on mutual respect and harmony.

Acts of compassion, no matter how small, contribute to a culture of hope and resilience.

As we welcome 2026, let us pledge to leave behind negativity, self-doubt, and hesitation.

Let us embrace challenges as opportunities, failures as lessons, and every day as a chance to make a positive difference.

Together, we can make this year not just another page in history, but a landmark of achievement, growth, and collective progress.

May 2026 bring joy, health, prosperity, and enlightenment to every home and community.

Here's to a year of renewed hopes, bright possibilities, and unwavering optimism—a year where dreams find wings and every effort contributes to a better tomorrow.

Jammu and Kashmir: A Year of natural calamities

■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF



The year 2025 emerged as one of the most challenging periods in recent history for Jammu and Kashmir, as a series of natural calamities exposed the region's deep vulnerability to extreme weather events. Torrential rains, cloudbursts, flash floods and landslides struck across districts in both the Jammu and Kashmir divisions, leaving behind a trail of human suffering, economic loss and damaged infrastructure. As the region steps into 2026, the focus has gradually shifted from emergency response to long-term resilience, climate adaptation and sustainable disaster management.

Jammu and Kashmir's unique geography, defined by steep Himalayan slopes, fragile mountain ecosystems and dense river networks, has always made it prone to natural hazards. However, the scale and intensity of disasters witnessed in 2025 reflected a growing pattern of climate variability that is increasingly difficult to predict or manage through conventional means. Prolonged dry spells followed by sudden, intense rainfall placed enormous pressure on rivers, slopes and human settlements, often overwhelming natural drainage systems and disaster preparedness mechanisms.

The monsoon season of 2025 proved particularly destructive. Heavy rainfall episodes persisted over several weeks, triggering flash floods in low-lying areas and landslides in mountainous terrain. Rivers such as the Jhelum, Chenab and their tributaries swelled rapidly, inundating agricultural land, residential areas and critical infrastructure. Several towns and villages experienced prolonged waterlogging, forcing thousands of families to abandon their homes and seek shelter in safer locations.

In the Jammu region, intense rainfall and cloudbursts led to sudden surges in seasonal streams, sweeping away vehicles, footbridges and temporary structures. Hilly districts bore the brunt of landslides, which not only caused loss of life but also severed road connectivity for days at a time. The repeated closure of National Highway 44 due to landslides underscored the fragility of the region's transport lifelines and highlighted the challenges faced by rescue teams attempting to reach isolated communities.

The Kashmir Valley witnessed its own share of devastation as sustained rainfall led to rising water levels in rivers and canals. Low-lying areas, particularly those with encroached floodplains and degraded wetlands, were among the worst affected. Urban centres struggled with drainage failures, while rural areas saw widespread damage to



crops and orchards. Apple growers, in particular, faced significant losses as waterlogging and soil erosion affected fruit-bearing trees during a critical period of the agricultural calendar.

Cloudbursts added an unpredictable and deadly dimension to the disasters of 2025. These highly localized events, often occurring with little warning, unleashed enormous volumes of water and debris within minutes. Remote mountain villages were especially vulnerable, as narrow valleys and steep slopes amplified the destructive force of sudden water flows. In several instances, entire hamlets were partially buried under mud and stones, leaving residents with little time to escape.

Beyond the immediate human toll, the economic consequences of the disasters were severe. Agriculture, horticulture and livestock rearing - key pillars of the rural economy - suffered heavy setbacks. Damaged roads and disrupted supply chains affected tourism and trade, compounding the financial strain on households already grappling with inflation and employment uncertainty. Public infrastructure, including schools, health centres, power stations and water supply systems, sustained extensive damage, placing additional pressure on administrative resources.

The events of 2025 also revealed systemic gaps in disaster preparedness and risk communication. While weather advisories were issued, the localized nature of cloudbursts and the rapid escalation of flooding often left little scope for timely evacuation. Communication breakdowns during peak emergencies further complicated coordination among response agencies. In many cases, local communities and volunteers emerged as the first responders, highlighting both the strength of community solidarity and the lim-

itations of formal disaster response structures.

Relief and rescue operations were launched across affected districts, involving disaster response forces, local administration, security agencies and civil society groups. Evacuation drives, temporary shelters and medical assistance helped prevent even greater loss of life. Restoration of road connectivity and essential services became a priority in the weeks that followed, as authorities worked to stabilize damaged slopes, clear debris and rehabilitate affected families. Despite these efforts, the sheer scale of destruction made it clear that reactive measures alone would no longer suffice in the face of intensifying climate risks.

As 2026 began, the discourse around natural disasters in Jammu and Kashmir shifted decisively toward resilience and risk reduction. Policymakers, planners and disaster management authorities acknowledged the need for a more integrated approach that combines scientific forecasting, infrastructure planning, environmental conservation and community participation. Strengthening early warning systems emerged as a central priority, with efforts directed toward improving weather monitoring, real-time data sharing and last-mile communication in vulnerable areas.

Infrastructure resilience has also taken centre stage. Roads, bridges and public buildings damaged in 2025 are being rebuilt with an emphasis on climate-resilient design. Slope stabilization, improved drainage systems and riverbank protection measures are being expanded in landslide- and flood-prone zones. Critical transport corridors are receiving special attention, given their importance for emergency response, economic activity and social connectivity.

Urban planning reforms are gaining

momentum as well. Authorities are reassessing land-use patterns that have increased exposure to floods and landslides. Encroachments along riverbanks and wetlands are being reviewed, while efforts are underway to restore natural water bodies that once served as buffers during heavy rainfall. In cities and towns, upgraded drainage networks and stricter building norms aim to reduce future flood risks.

Environmental restoration has become an integral part of disaster mitigation strategies in 2026. Reforestation drives, watershed management programmes and soil conservation initiatives are being promoted to stabilize slopes and improve water absorption. These measures not only reduce disaster risk but also support biodiversity and long-term ecological balance in the fragile Himalayan region.

Community preparedness has emerged as a crucial pillar of resilience-building. Training programmes focused on basic disaster response, first aid and evacuation procedures are being extended to local volunteers, schools and panchayat institutions. Public awareness campaigns emphasize the importance of early evacuation, safe construction practices and environmental stewardship. By empowering communities with knowledge and skills, authorities hope to reduce dependence on external aid during emergencies.

Support for climate-resilient livelihoods is another focus area in 2026. Farmers and orchardists are being encouraged to adopt practices better suited to changing weather patterns, including improved water management, crop diversification and soil protection techniques. Financial assistance mechanisms and insurance coverage are being streamlined to ensure quicker recovery for affected households when disasters strike.

The natural calamities of 2025 served as a stark reminder of the growing impact of climate change on Jammu and Kashmir. As extreme weather events become more frequent and intense, the challenge lies in aligning development priorities with environmental realities. The steps taken in 2026 reflect a growing recognition that disaster resilience must be woven into every aspect of planning, from infrastructure and agriculture to urban growth and environmental conservation.

While the road ahead remains complex, the lessons learned from 2025 have laid the groundwork for a more proactive and inclusive approach to disaster management. The collective effort to build resilience offers cautious hope that Jammu and Kashmir can better withstand future challenges, protecting lives, livelihoods and the region's delicate natural heritage.

(The author is a senior analyst)

Ladakh at Crossroads of Progress: Achievements of 2025 & Vision Ahead for 2026

■ TSERING YANGCHEN

The year 2025 emerged as a pivotal period in Ladakh's evolving development narrative, marked by tangible progress across infrastructure, renewable energy, governance and social sectors. Amid its difficult terrain and ecologically sensitive environment, Ladakh continued to demonstrate that carefully calibrated planning, transparent administration and community participation can deliver sustainable outcomes while preserving its distinct cultural and environmental heritage. The year also witnessed a renewed momentum in governance with the appointment of Shri Kavinder Gupta as the Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh, whose leadership brought a clear focus on stability, inclusive growth and citizen-centric administration.

Under this framework, connectivity and infrastructure development remained a core priority throughout 2025. Sustained execution of strategic road and bridge projects significantly improved access to remote and border areas, strengthening both civilian mobility and national security preparedness. Enhanced last-mile connectivity in regions such as Nubra, Changthang and Zaskar reduced geographical isolation, improved service delivery and enabled better access to healthcare, education and markets. These interventions not only improved quality of life for residents but also created new avenues for eco-

nomie activity and social integration.

A defining milestone of the year was Ladakh's steady advancement towards clean and sustainable energy. The commissioning of the 100 kw pilot solar power project at Paang marked a major step in harnessing the region's vast solar potential under extreme climatic conditions. Envisioned as a model project, it is expected to reduce dependence on conventional fuel sources, lower carbon emissions and guide future large-scale renewable energy initiatives in Ladakh. Alongside this, ongoing work on strengthening the power transmission network, including high-capacity lines for Nubra and Zaskar, continued to enhance power reliability and long-term energy security across the Union Territory.

Tourism development in 2025 focused on diversification and sustainability, with special emphasis on creating the foundations for a robust winter tourism economy. Recognising the potential of winter activities to generate year-round livelihoods and reduce seasonal dependency, the administration initiated planning exercises and stakeholder consultations to position Ladakh as a four-season destination. In this direction, the Winter Conclave, proposed to be organised in 2026, along with a Familiarisation (FAM) Tour, has been envisaged as a strategic platform to bring together policymakers, tourism stakeholders, tour operators and media. These initiatives aim to

showcase Ladakh's winter tourism potential, improve infrastructure preparedness and promote responsible, eco-sensitive tourism practices. Sports and youth engagement also gained renewed emphasis during the year. A new Sports Policy was placed in the public domain in 2025, reflecting the administration's commitment to structured sports development, talent identification and strengthening of sports infrastructure. The policy, expected to be formally notified soon, provides a comprehensive roadmap for nurturing sporting excellence across Ladakh. Complementing this effort, Khelo India Winter Games events, including disciplines such as ice hockey, are scheduled to be held, reinforcing Ladakh's growing identity as a hub for winter sports and offering local youth opportunities to compete and excel at national platforms. Good governance and administrative reforms formed the backbone of Ladakh's progress in 2025. Expansion of digital and citizen-centric services significantly enhanced transparency, efficiency and ease of access to government services. Online recruitment processes, timely declaration of examination results, digital certification services and strengthened grievance redressal mechanisms reflected a strong emphasis on accountability, meritocracy and outcome-based administration. These reforms reduced procedural delays and strengthened public trust in governance, aligning administration

closely with citizens' expectations. Sustainable and inclusive development remained central to all policy interventions during the year. Developmental projects were planned and executed with due consideration to Ladakh's fragile ecology, emphasising eco-friendly construction, community participation and conservation of natural resources. Investments in community infrastructure, social welfare initiatives and grassroots institutions strengthened social cohesion, particularly in remote and high-altitude areas, ensuring that development benefits reached all sections of society. Human development and cultural preservation also received sustained attention. Educational achievements by Ladakhi youth at national levels reflected rising aspirations and improved access to opportunities. Simultaneously, promotion of cultural festivals, heritage events and traditional practices reinforced Ladakh's unique identity, integrating cultural preservation with responsible tourism and local economic development. The appointment of Shri Kavinder Gupta as the Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of Ladakh during this period added renewed direction to the Union Territory's governance framework. His vision emphasises good governance, development with accountability, strategic infrastructure growth, and inclusive progress, while ensuring that Ladakh's ecological balance and cultural her-

itage remain protected. The leadership focus on transparency, efficient service delivery and people-centric administration has further strengthened confidence in Ladakh's developmental path.

As Ladakh moves into 2026, the focus will be on consolidating the gains achieved in 2025 and scaling up successful initiatives. Key priorities include expansion of renewable energy projects building on the Paang solar pilot, operationalising winter tourism through the proposed Winter Conclave and FAM Tour, effective implementation of the new Sports Policy, hosting national-level winter sports events, deepening digital governance reforms and investing in climate-resilient infrastructure. Continued emphasis on education, healthcare, skill development and youth empowerment will remain integral to this forward-looking vision.

Overall, 2025 has firmly positioned Ladakh on a path of resilient, sustainable and people-centric development. Guided by clear strategic direction and inclusive governance, the Union Territory under the visionary leadership of Lt Governor Shri Kavinder Gupta, stands well-prepared to transform the momentum of 2025 into enduring progress in 2026—harmonising development with ecology, tradition with modernity, and aspirations with opportunity.

India's Energy Moment: How 2025 Turned Reform into Reality

Energy reform rarely announces itself in a single moment. It unfolds quietly, across laws rewritten, supply chains secured, institutions repaired, and capacity expanded. India's energy story in 2025 belongs to that category: a year when long-pending reforms across power, nuclear energy, clean transition, and strategic materials finally converged into execution.

On this backdrop, it is worth recalling the 2008 civil nuclear agreement with the US and how it was hailed as a diplomatic breakthrough. Parliament debated it intensely, the then UPA government popularised it, and India was told it had finally broken out of decades of nuclear isolation. Yet unsurprisingly, little changed on the ground during the Congress era. India's nuclear sector remained bound by restrictive liability laws, closed to private participation, and frozen inside a legal architecture dating back to the 1960s. The deal which was supposed to unlock international access but ended up getting putting India in a limbo.

That contrast explains why 2025 matters. 17 years later, India did not revisit the symbolism of nuclear diplomacy; it corrected the structural neglect that followed it. Reform in 2025 is not about announcing ambition; it is about redesigning systems that power a \$4-trillion economy. The past underlines the difficulty, but the present delivers the outcome.

Nuclear Energy: The Long Pause Ends

The most consequential reform of 2025 lies in nuclear energy. With the passage of the SHANTI Bill, India finally dismantled a framework that had stalled its civil nuclear sector for more than 6 decades. For years, nuclear power remained marginal not because of a lack of need, but because outdated liability norms and regulatory ambiguity made expansion practically impossible.

What distinguishes the SHANTI reform is not merely the opening of the sector to private participation, but the manner in which growth is now enabled. By updating liability provisions and clarifying accountability, the reform allows nuclear capacity

to expand in a far safer, internationally aligned fashion.

Globally, countries such as France and the United States rely on diversified ownership models in nuclear energy, combining public oversight with private execution. India's reform moves in the same direction, adapted to domestic safety and regulatory needs. This is not deregulation. It is a disciplined opening, where expansion is tied to higher safety benchmarks rather than diluted oversight.

This law will unlock \$100 - 150 billion of new capital from private domestic and foreign investors into nuclear power projects through to 2047 leading to 12-14 times increase in nuclear energy generation and reduce carbon emissions associated with fossil fuel generation.

This shift matters because renewable energy, while essential, introduces variability into the grid. As solar and wind scale rapidly, the need for clean, reliable baseload power becomes unavoidable. Nuclear energy fills that gap. In 2025, India moved beyond symbolism and enabled nuclear power to grow as part of a balanced, safer energy mix.

Critical Minerals: The Blind Spot Brought Centre Stage

Until recently, critical minerals barely featured in India's energy discourse. Lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earths were treated as procurement issues rather than strategic vulnerabilities. Energy transition was discussed in terms of megawatts, not materials. That complacency ended when global supply disruptions exposed how dependent clean technologies are on a handful of concentrated supply chains.

In 2025, that blind spot was addressed decisively. The National Critical Mineral Mission marks a strategic pivot, backed by nearly Rs 32,000 crore in public funding and investment commitments. The mission targets 24 key minerals essential for electric mobility, renewable energy, electronics, aerospace, and defence. Its scope is deliberately broad, spanning domestic exploration, overseas partnerships, processing, recycling, skills, and technology development.

Crucially, the mission is not limited to extraction. It explicitly targets downstream processing, refining, and manufacturing capabilities, ensuring that value addition occurs domestically rather than being exported along with raw materials. This closes a long-standing gap where India mined resources but imported finished components.

At the heart of this effort is a Rs7,280-crore initiative to build domestic capacity for rare-earth permanent magnets. These components are indispensable for EV drivetrains, wind turbines, precision aerospace systems, and advanced defence platforms. Until now, India has relied heavily on imports from a supply chain dominated by a few global players. Building domestic capability here is not an incremental policy; it is strategic insurance.

Equally important is a quiet but transformative regulatory reform. The Mines and Minerals Amendment of 2025 introduces the principle of "one lease, many minerals," allowing existing mining leaseholders to add newly discovered critical minerals without fresh royalties or procedural resets. The result is faster discovery, better utilisation of existing mines, and lower input costs across clean-technology value chains.

Taken together, these measures mark a shift from energy transition rhetoric to industrial sovereignty. India is no longer content with importing the future. In 2025, it began securing it.

Scarcity Management to System Design

Scarcity in India's power sector was once so severe that it made global headlines. In July 2012, the world witnessed one of the largest blackouts in the history of India, affecting hundreds of millions. The episode was not a one-off accident. It exposed deep structural weaknesses: financially broken distribution companies, distorted pricing, underinvestment in networks, and a system held together by administrative controls rather than institutional discipline. That legacy defines the scale of the correction now underway.

The Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2025 addresses this weak-

ness directly. Building on the Electricity Act of 2003, the reform focuses on competition in distribution, network modernisation, and service quality. Its core insight is simple: affordable electricity cannot be sustained through inefficiency. It must be delivered through better infrastructure, lower technical losses, and financial discipline.

Crucially, targeted protections for farmers and vulnerable households remain intact. The shift is not about withdrawing support, but about ensuring that support rests on a financially viable system. Electricity reform is finally being treated not as welfare management, but as economic infrastructure.

Renewables: Scale Achieved, Credibility Earned

Even in renewables, the approach has been integrated rather than piecemeal. From large-scale solar parks and wind corridors to decentralised adoption through PM Surya Ghar rooftop solar and PM-KUSUM for farmers, clean energy expansion has touched households, agriculture, and industry simultaneously. This breadth is what has allowed scale without fragmentation.

India's renewable energy story in 2025 is no longer just an aspiration. It is about delivery. By mid-2025, India ranks among the world's leading renewable energy producers: fourth globally in total installed renewable capacity, fourth in wind power, and third in solar. Installed renewable capacity has nearly tripled since 2014, while solar capacity has expanded almost fortyfold.

More significant than scale is achievement. India has met its official Paris climate commitments years ahead of schedule. Non-fossil sources now account for roughly 44% of installed power capacity, surpassing the 2030 target, while the emissions intensity of GDP has fallen sharply from 2005 levels. This early delivery has allowed India to raise its ambition further, not dilute it.

The contrast with the past needs no exaggeration. Earlier efforts stopped at intent and symbolism. In 2025, India crossed decisively into execution.

