The ghost of Kashmir: Once raised against India, now haunting Pakistan

Hindol Sengupta • June 12, 2026,

The Mirpuris and other Kashmiris in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir are no longer merely objects in Pakistan's Kashmir policy; they are becoming subjects in their own right, and they are speaking in a language the state cannot easily absorb

Pakistan may try to frame the events as temporary unrest, foreign instigation, or law-and-order trouble, but the deeper truth is harder to dismiss. Image: Reuters

The present unrest in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir is more than another local protest cycle. It is a political reckoning in a region that Islamabad has long treated as a strategic asset, a propaganda shield, and a disposable frontier. The anger now erupting in Mirpur, Muzaffarabad, Kotli, Rawalakot, and other towns marks a profound shift: communities once mobilised by Pakistan against India are increasingly turning their fury toward the Pakistani army, the civil administration, and the entire structure of control built over them.

This is especially significant in the case of the Mirpuris. For decades, Mirpur and its wider diaspora were folded into Pakistan's Kashmir narrative as proof of "popular"

support for Islamabad's position on the dispute. The region was politically instrumentalised, emotionally scripted, and strategically paraded in speeches, textbooks, and media campaigns. But the lived reality of those same people has been one of extraction, humiliation, and neglect. The current protests show that once a population sees through the language of guardianship, it can become the sharpest critic of the state that claimed to represent it.

The immediate trigger is economic misery. Protesters have rallied against inflation, heavy electricity bills, taxes, and the denial of basic relief, including demands for subsidised wheat flour and fairer power pricing. Yet the deeper cause is political deprivation. Demonstrators are asking why outside refugees receive reserved legislative seats, why local resources do not translate into local welfare, and why the administration remains more responsive to coercion than to consent. In this sense, the unrest is not only about prices; it is about dignity, representation, and the right to be governed with accountability.

Pakistan's response has only intensified the crisis. Reports from the region describe police firing on protesters, multiple deaths, scores injured, and a heavy crackdown that has deepened public anger. In several accounts, protesters have directly chanted against the Pakistan Army and its leadership, revealing a political rupture that goes far beyond anti-government grievances. When a population begins to identify the military as the central source of oppression, the legitimacy of the entire security-state model starts to crack.

The Mirpur factor matters because Mirpuris have long occupied a peculiar position in the political imagination of Pakistan. They were useful as symbols, useful as expatriate networks, useful as proof that the Kashmir cause belonged to Pakistan's national identity. But utility is not loyalty, and symbolism is not consent. Many Mirpuris have also experienced the contradictions of the Pakistani state directly: underinvestment at home, exploitation of local resources, and the transformation of Kashmir into a security theatre rather than a self-governing political space. The current unrest exposes the gap between the story Islamabad told about Mirpur and the reality Mirpur has lived.

There is also a broader pattern here that should not be missed. What is unfolding in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir is part of a wider crisis of the Pakistani state itself: fiscal

exhaustion, political alienation, and the inability of the centre to command consent in the peripheries. When protest spreads from one district to another, and when slogans shift from policy demands to direct denunciation of the military, the issue is no longer a single grievance movement. It becomes an indictment of the state's governing philosophy.

For India, these developments carry obvious geopolitical significance, but they should be understood carefully. The point is not to reduce the Mirpuri protest to an external instrument, nor to romanticise it as a straightforward strategic gift. It is, above all, a local revolt against misrule. Yet the strategic consequence is undeniable: every such uprising weakens Pakistan's claim to moral authority in Kashmir and exposes the coercive foundations of its control. In the long run, the more Islamabad relies on force rather than legitimacy, the more it erodes the very narrative it has spent decades exporting.

One look at the list of British parliamentarians protesting against the Pakistani government shows that many of these are some of the most virulent critics of India, traditionally, in the UK. They are now turning against the Pakistani army-ruled state.

The irony is striking. The people whom Pakistan once tried to use as political weapons against India are now showing that resentment has its own memory. Communities cannot be permanently scripted into someone else's national theatre. If they are denied representation, resources, and respect, they eventually stop performing the roles assigned to them. That is the lesson Mirpur is teaching today: coercion may manufacture silence for a time, but it cannot manufacture belonging.)

This is why the anti-Pakistan turn in PoK matters beyond the immediate headlines. It reveals the limits of militarised nationalism and the fragility of a system that conflates control with legitimacy. It also reminds us that in contested regions, the decisive struggle is not only over territory but also over political meaning—who belongs, who decides, and who bears the costs of the state's ambitions.

Pakistan may still try to frame these events as temporary unrest, foreign instigation, or law-and-order trouble. But the deeper truth is harder to dismiss. The Mirpuris and other Kashmiris in PoK are no longer merely objects in Pakistan's Kashmir policy; they are becoming subjects in their own right, and they are speaking in a language the

state cannot easily absorb. That shift is one of the most important political developments in the region in years.

(Hindol Sengupta is a professor of international relations at OP Jindal Global University. Views expressed in the above piece are personal and solely those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect Firstpost's views.)