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## **ERDOĞAN TO ATTEND FUZULI AIRPORT INAUGURATION IN AZERBAIJAN**

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President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will travel to Azerbaijan's city of Fuzuli, recently liberated from Armenian occupation, to attend the inauguration ceremony of the newly constructed airport.

Erdoğan will attend the opening of Fuzuli International Airport, which is currently undergoing an extensive renovation process, to facilitate the safe return of residents to their homes displaced after the Armenian occupation.

The airport is expected to contribute to Nagorno-Karabakh's tourism and economy.

Following Azerbaijan's victory after a 44-day conflict that started in September 2020, Armenian forces left the region after vandalizing the houses and looting everything they could on their way out. Now, it is difficult to find a building in the cities of Nagorno-Karabakh, including Jabrayil, Fuzuli and Lachin, that has not been reduced to piles of rubble. Although the symbolic city of the region Shusha was relatively luckier than the others in terms of surviving the vandalism, the religious and cultural monuments in the city still suffered from the aftermath of the war.

The priority of the Azerbaijani army is to clear the area of mines planted by Armenian forces and secure the region. So far, since the end of the conflict, 14 Azerbaijanis have lost their lives due to the mines.

Apart from clearing the mines, Azerbaijan also kicked off efforts to come up with plans and projects for the region while determining the damage and its costs to the region as well. The Azerbaijani government plans to carry the issue to the international courts once it is able to assess the overall damage in the region caused by Armenian forces.

Relations between the former Soviet republics have been tense since 1991 when the Armenian military occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory recognized as part of Azerbaijan, and seven adjacent regions. Fresh clashes erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan in late September, rekindling the Caucasus neighbors' decadeslong conflict over the region. During the conflict, Azerbaijan liberated several towns and nearly 300 settlements and villages from Armenian occupation.

Fierce fighting persisted for six weeks despite efforts by France, Russia and the United States to broker cease-fires, before Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a Moscow-brokered peace deal on Nov. 9. The agreement was signed after Baku's army overwhelmed separatist forces and threatened to

advance on Karabakh's main city, Stepanakert (Khankendi).

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