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Institute for a Community
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人類命運共同體研究院



27 September:
Honouring Azerbaijan's Fallen



By Mr. Imran Bhatti, Member Board of Experts,
Pakistan Research Center for a Community with Shared
Future (PRCCSF), Islamabad

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Six years after the 44-day war, Remembrance Day is still about the names. But it has also become a way of asking a harder question — what the sacrifice secured, and whether the answer is being built.

A day of mourning, by decree

In Azerbaijan, 27 September is not a celebration. It is a day of mourning — Anım Günü — and the choice of date is deliberate. It marks the morning in 2020 when the 44-day war began, and it was formally established by presidential decree on 2 December 2020, less than a month after the fighting stopped.

The day is observed quietly. Flags, flowers, a minute of silence, schoolchildren on the Alley of Martyrs in Baku, families travelling to graves in districts they were pushed out of thirty years earlier. There are no parades. People do not gather on 27 September to hear speeches about victory; they gather to remember specific men who did not come home.



That distinction matters, and Azerbaijan has kept it deliberately. Victory Day is 8 November, the day Shusha was liberated. Remembrance Day is 27 September, the day the war started. One is for what was achieved. The other is for what it cost.

Forty-four days

The war ran from 27 September to the ceasefire that took effect at midnight on 10 November 2020. Over those 44 days, Azerbaijan restored control over its internationally recognised territories, securing the districts occupied since the early 1990s and ending a three-decade status quo that had displaced roughly a million Azerbaijanis. Azerbaijani forces advanced through Fuzuli and Jabrayil, moved toward Hadrut, then took Zangilan and Gubadli before the offensive that reached Shusha. The trilateral statement signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia ended the fighting.

Not everyone could see any of that in November 2020. What people saw then was a country burying its sons.



What the numbers cannot hold

Azerbaijan did not publish casualty figures while the war was being fought. On 3 December 2020, it stated that 2,783 of its servicemen had given their lives; later revisions brought the total to close to three thousand. International monitors documented at least 146 civilians lost across the 44-day conflict, on both sides.

Statistics like that are useful for understanding a war and useless for understanding a family. The part that never makes it into the totals is the parents, the widows, the children who were small in the autumn of 2020 and are now starting school. A war ends on a signature. Grief does not.

Going home is not the same as returning

The other thread of 27 September is the one that runs forward, and it is where the sacrifice of 2020 becomes visible in ordinary life. Because territorial integrity was restored, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Azerbaijanis have been given the legal and practical means to return to the districts their families left thirty years ago. The war is what made the return possible. The rebuilding is what makes it real.

The scale is unusual for a post-conflict reconstruction. Three international airports have opened in the liberated areas, at Fuzuli, Zangilan and Lachin, along with hundreds of kilometres of road and rail. The smart villages began with Aghali in Zangilan district, which welcomed its first residents in May 2022 and runs on renewable power with digital services built into the plan rather than bolted onto it.

Returns have followed in stages. Displaced families began moving back to Lachin in May 2023 and to Fuzuli in August 2023. Aghdam, handed back on 20 November 2020 without a shot being fired, began receiving its residents in March 2025. According to the presidential administration, more than 48,000 people now live and work in the liberated territories. Under the first State Programme on the Great Return, approved in November 2022 and covering 2022 to 2026, the target for the end of this year is around 140,000.

Those two numbers are the ones to watch. Bringing 140,000 people home is not a housing problem. It is a jobs problem, a school problem and a patience problem.

The long work of reconstruction

Before any of that could begin, the ground itself had to be made safe. Areas that saw two wars and thirty years of entrenchment are contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnance, and that contamination has been one of the single largest obstacles to Azerbaijan's reconstruction and to the safe return of displaced families. A field cannot be ploughed, a pipeline cannot be laid and a child cannot walk to a new school until the land beneath them is cleared.

Azerbaijan has treated that burden as humanitarian work rather than a footnote. The Mine Action Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan has cleared well over 298,000 hectares and detected more than 260,000 mines and unexploded ordnance since November 2020, including the clearance of several thousand hectares in a single month this year. The work is dangerous and slow, and men in visors advance metre by metre across terrain that has been mined for decades. Some of them have lost



their lives doing it. Their families observe 27 September the same way everyone else does.

The effort has also been deliberately international. Azerbaijan has convened annual conferences on humanitarian demining jointly with the United Nations, the fourth of which took place in Baku in September 2026, and the United Nations Development Programme works alongside the national agency on equipment, training and emergency response teams. Azerbaijan inherited a humanitarian obstacle of extraordinary scale. Clearing it is work the country is doing, and doing in cooperation with others.

Peace, measured in freight

The most unexpected development of the last year has been the quiet and practical normalisation with Armenia — and it is being measured in tonnage rather than sentiment.

Azerbaijan took the initiative in making that possible. It lifted transit restrictions in late 2025, and freight began moving by rail through its territory toward and into Armenia. Between January and August 2026, direct exports to Armenia exceeded \$17 million — a rounding error

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in Azerbaijan's total trade, but a genuine first. The cargo was practical: thousands of tonnes of diesel and petrol, agricultural products, fertiliser, timber, with third-country goods moving through as transit.

Azerbaijan has also been building the infrastructure that makes regional connectivity possible, completing the rail and road works on its own territory along the Zangezur route to Nakhchivan — a corridor designed to link East–West and North–South trade, which Azerbaijan initiated and President Ilham Aliyev has described as a win-win for the region.

Alongside the rail, there is a digital corridor: national operators AzerTelecom and Telecom Armenia now route a portion of Armenia's international internet traffic across Azerbaijani networks, while Azerbaijan sends data to its Nakhchivan exclave through Armenian infrastructure. Two countries that could not agree on a border are quietly agreeing on fibre.

The diplomatic architecture behind this was formalised at the White House on 8 August 2025, when the leaders of both countries signed a joint declaration on a comprehensive peace agreement. Civil society dialogue has continued since, including a fourth round of Armenian and Azerbaijani participants meeting in Gabala in April 2026, and in the same spirit Azerbaijan supported Armenia's candidacy for a regional UN climate group seat. On 18 September this year, at a ceremony in Wiesbaden, Armenia's prime minister received a peace prize and said from the podium that Azerbaijan's president was equally deserving of it.

That sentence would have been unthinkable on 27 September 2020. It is not a resolution of everything. It is evidence that the region has moved.

What the day is for

Azerbaijan observes Remembrance Day for the obvious reason: because those who gave their lives should be named and remembered, and because a country that does not do that tends to forget what war actually costs. The decree establishing the day was signed before the visible achievements of reconstruction had set in — before the airports, before the smart villages, before the freight trains. That timing was not an accident.





But six years on, remembrance has acquired a second job. It has become the standard against which the rebuilding is measured. If a family returns to Aghdam or Zangilan and finds work, a school, water and a functioning clinic, then something is being completed. The ultimate measure of reconstruction will be whether these communities become prosperous, sustainable places where families can build their futures.

The soldiers of the 44 days are no longer here to be asked what they would want. The most honest way to honour them is not to praise the sacrifice in September and ignore its purpose for the rest of the year. It is to continue building the peaceful, prosperous and sovereign country for which they gave their lives.

27 September is a day of mourning. It should stay one — and it should stay useful.