

## Sitharaman reviews security ahead of Amarnath yatra

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Three days before the first batch of pilgrims leaves for the holy cave shrine of Amarnath in south Kashmir, the defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday visited the Baltal base camp to review the security arrangements. She was accompanied by senior commanders of the Army. Security forces are this time taking no risk as a number of terrorists of various outfits were reportedly hiding in south Kashmir that will be the nerve center of the pilgrimage.

More than 22,000 security force personnel have been deployed on the security of pilgrims. Sitharaman was reportedly briefed about the three layer security arrangements on the two pilgrimage routes. The two month long pilgrimage will begin on 28 June and the first batch will leave for Srinagar from Jammu on 27 June. Paramilitary forces have been deployed in strength on the 400 kms road route between Lakhampur in the Kathua district of Jammu and the two base camps at Pahalgam (Anantnag) and Baltal (Ganderbal). It is a 4 days mountainous trek of 36 kms from Pahalgam to reach the cave shrine at the height of 12,756 ft. The trek from Baltal is about 14 kms but the climb is steep on the route and pilgrims can return to the base camp the same day after "darshan" and prayers of the ice-lingam. The Army chief, General Bipin Rawat and Army commander of the Northern Command, Lt. Gen. Ranbir Singh last week separately reviewed the security arrangements of the pilgrimage. The security forces have eliminated seven terrorists, three of them Pakistani nationals, in south Kashmir in the past four days indicating presence of militants in the area. An Army patrol was attacked by terrorists when the soldiers were trying to open a road leading to the pilgrimage base camp. Meanwhile, Chief Secretary, BVR Subrahmanyam, on Monday issued a series of instructions to the administration to ensure hassle-free and smooth conduct of Shri Amarnath Yatra. He ordered the meteorological department to send weather reports from today to all concerned functionaries. The Chief Secretary also stressed the need for ensuring greater communication and coordination between the civil and police administration and the Deputy Commissioners will review the capacities being created by the line departments.