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23 Other state Matter

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ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: The Hindu ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE : 5/4/21

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# Sukma encounter toll touches 22; Shah cuts short campaign

31 personnel injured, one commando is still missing, say Chhattisgarh police

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NEW DELHI

A day after the encounter between Central paramilitary forces and Maoists in Chhattisgarh's Sukma, bodies of 22 personnel were recovered on Sunday. One commando was still missing, the Chhattisgarh police said. Thirty-one others were injured. The bodies could be retrieved only close to 24 hours after the attack at noon on Saturday. Some jawans may have died due to excessive bleeding, a police officer said.

On reports that a jawan's body may have been mutilated, the officer said, "There was intense firing from both sides and it is possible that the victim was blown up due to the impact; we can con-



**Exercising caution:** A jawan checking the body of a fallen colleague for explosives in Sukma. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

firm only after the postmortem is conducted."

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who were both campaigning for the Assam election, returned to Raipur and

New Delhi respectively as the toll rose.

K. Vijay Kumar, Senior Security Adviser, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), said for the past two weeks the Maoists were trying to disrupt the construction of a

## Few takers for naxalism: CM

The Naxals carried out the Bijapur attack to assert their presence since the people were growing disenchanted with them and were joining the mainstream because of developmental work done by the State government, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said. ▶ PAGE 9

road near Silger-Jagargunda. "The security forces and the Maoists were engaged in a cat and mouse game for the past two weeks," he said.

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## Sukma encounter toll touches 22

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“The forces tactically withdrew some operations and we were waiting for them, this is where (Tarrem, site of encounter) the Maoists had mobilised on Saturday,” Mr. Kumar told *The Hindu*.

The official added that Tarrem is one of the core areas of the Maoists, and the joint forces were on an area-domination exercise.

A joint team of the Chhattisgarh police, comprising the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Special Task Force (STF), along with various teams of the Central Reserve Police Force had proceeded for a combing operation in south Bastar on Friday night.

Mr. Kumar said the Maoists had used “improvised grenades” to attack the forces.

He denied that the security forces were moving in large numbers that could have exposed them to the Maoists.

“The security forces were in appropriate numbers; it is too simplistic to say [that they were in large number], there were tactical gaps between them, they had maintained appropriate offensive and defensive postures ... they were spread in four groups – around 130 each from four directions. Improvised grenades were used by the Maoists. It was a combing operation, the radius of operation was around 30

km; they were completely independent teams,” Mr. Kumar said.

He added, “There were no specific inputs but these formations [of Maoists] were wanting to hit the security forces for quite some time... For two weeks, they were trying to do some mischief on Silged-Jagargunda road that was under construction. The road jeopardises their existence... It has cut away their territory,” he said.

The officer denied that there was a delay in retrieving the bodies.

“By the time the haze of combat subsided, the forces waited for an opportune time... Therefore, they waited, they went again in the morning. Removal of bodies takes time, as Maoists are capable of putting bombs in bodies, they [retrieval teams] have to be doubly sure,” he said.

The Chhattisgarh police said in a statement that the teams were dispatched to Tarrem as they wanted to corner People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) chief Hidma, who was said to be in the area. Hidma heads PLGA Battalion 1, one of the most lethally armed units of the Maoists active in southern Chhattisgarh. He is also said to have been involved in the 2010 attack, when 76 CRPF jawans were killed at Tadmetla in Dantewada.