



Space for campaign

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EC went by rule book on ASAT issue, but PM should have upheld the spirit of Model Code

- In ruling that Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not violate the Model Code of Conduct by announcing through a nationally televised address the demonstration of India's capability to bring down an operational satellite, the Election Commission has taken a possibly correct view of the Code's provisions.
- However, it remains a narrow technical view as it is a thin line that divides the idea of making a high-level declaration of a defence capability from using it for electoral advantage.
- Opposition parties had accused the Prime Minister of violating the Model Code by touting the demonstration of the anti-satellite (ASAT) missile test as a significant achievement of the ruling BJP.
- A five-member committee formed by the EC concluded that the relevant provision was not attracted in this case.
- The committee's finding that there was no "misuse of official mass media" as Doordarshan and AIR took the feed from a news agency, and more than 60 channels did the same, is rooted in the letter of the code, not its spirit.
- As a landmark achievement in defence research, it deserved a public pronouncement at a high level. Even then, letting the DRDO explain the achievement first would have served the purpose.
- That the motive was to proclaim the ASAT demonstration as an achievement of the regime in the field of national security became obvious when it was propagated by the ruling party that its predecessor did not have the political will to approve such a test.

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