**Some excuse**

[**http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150731/jsp/opinion/story\_34500.jsp#.Vbx0FqQirIU**](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150731/jsp/opinion/story_34500.jsp#.Vbx0FqQirIU)

What the Syrian dictator, Bashar-al-Assad, has declared in his first public address in a year is a badly-kept secret. He recently admitted before a set of distinguished guests assembled in Damascus that his regime is slipping up. But he put his failure to prevent the splintering of Syria down to military fatigue. Mr Assad complained of his forces being steadily depleted by deaths, desertion and the dodging of compulsory service. The situation has forced a change of strategy: the giving up of some areas for the better protection of others. Mr Assad appears to be talking like the head of a company, trying his best to explain to shareholders the reason for the company's dismal showing at the bourses. There is no better example of the Assad regime always being about the protection of the interests of the ruling family and clique of loyalists. Not surprising, then, that the regime does not grudge the surrender of wide swathes of territory to rebel control in the north and south, if that means better protection for a privileged few in the west. Given Mr Assad's logic, it should be even less surprising that his regime should be ceding territory in the east to the dreaded Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, which recently expanded its base to the historic city of Palmyra and began its destruction without much ado.

Mr Assad's address naturally bore no mention of the severe hardship that his strategy of survival has forced on the people of the country he purports to rule. There are more than two million dead, millions injured and around four million uprooted from homes they have lived in for generations because of the importance Mr Assad attaches to his own political survival. Since several other regimes attach equal importance to his downfall, military aid and the supply of weapons to anti-Assad rebels, even those associated with al Qaida, have turned Syria into a killing field from where there is no escape. Innumerable people have tried to move to neighbouring countries that will no longer have them. International aid flowing into Syria has long proved inadequate to deal with a humanitarian crisis of such magnitude. Mr Assad should be vilified for the suffering he has caused. Unfortunately, like his audience in Damascus, powerful nations of the world believe him. To the West, now as convinced as its newfound friend, Iran, he is the last man standing before a Sunni tide engulfs the region.