COLOMBO: Two years have passed since Sri Lanka bid farewell to the last of their batting greats yet the South Asian side appears no nearer to ending what has been a difficult period of transition. When the brilliant Kumar Sangakkara followed the equally prolific Mahela Jayawardene into retirement in 2015, even the most optimistic Sri Lankan fans acknowledged the void they left was simply too big to be filled overnight.

What they probably did not anticipate was that two years down the line, the team would still be hopelessly in the throes of a seemingly interminable era of regeneration. Once admired, even revered, for their steady supply of freak bowlers with bizarre actions and a near-invincible record at home, Sri Lanka’s recent humiliating 3-0 whitewash at the hands of India made for a particularly painful watch.

Only Kusal Mendis and Dimuth Karunaratne managed glimpses of batting prowess but Sri Lanka were otherwise completely outclassed by the tourists in one of the most lop-sided series of recent times. “Since I’ve been in this team, this is the worst series loss I’ve experienced,” test skipper Dinesh Chandimal said after his team lost three matches in 11 days against their neighbours.

The debacle followed their first ever one-day series loss to Zimbabwe in which Angelo Mathews to relinquish the captaincy of both the test and one-day sides. Mathews appeared to have sparked a revival last year when they whitewashed Australia but the 3-0 home win proved little more than a false dawn.

Sri Lanka were subsequently thrashed in both tests and one-dayers in South Africa, lost a home test against Bangladesh and then failed to progress beyond the group stage at this year’s Champions Trophy. The India whitewash has to bring in the news media to call for a report from Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) to explain why the side performed so poorly, while former captain Aravinda de Silva believes the board lacks vision.

“We are going through a rebuilding process but you can’t be saying that forever,” de Silva, hero of Sri Lanka’s first World Cup triumph, told the Hindu newspaper last week. “Short-term process is good for a few months,defense. For example, Spurs were the better team for large parts of the semi-final match against Chelsea, but still conceded four goals. ‘It’s too difficult to change your mindset and be ready, when you are so comfortable at White Hart Lane,’ Pochettino said at the end of last season. Playing regularly at Wembley should help Tottenham’s cause, but it is unlikely to feel like home. The team will undoubtedly be at a disadvantage compared to its title rivals. ‘It is up to us,’ Tottenham captain Hugo Lloris said. ‘We are actors and have to put intensity into our performances, in our running and in our movement. We have to create something at Wembley.’

There are historical parallels to Tottenham’s travails at Wembley, and they are found close to home. North London rival Arsenal played its Champions League games at the old White Hart Lane (1998-2000) and the team failed to advance from the group stage in either season. ‘It was a disastrous group stage, with the team struggling to keep compact in the middle of the field and its defense playing a high line. Just to get one point over at Wembley and therefore cracks appear in the team’s set-up, especially in one or two key areas,” said former Tottenham manager Arsene Wenger said last year. ‘In hindsight, it was the wrong decision,’ There’s no going back for Tottenham now, though. It’s time to find a cure for its Wembley woes, starting this season against the team that denied Spurs the title in May. — AP

LANKA TRANSITION GRINDS TO HALT AT INDIA ROADBLOCK

SYDNEY: The All Blacks will be out to reassert their dominance as the wounded Wallabies look to the return of Kurtley Beale for his first Test since the World Cup final with New Zealand.

The pressure is on coach Michael Cheika and his Wallabies after their shock home loss to Scotland in June and coming off a dreadful Super Rugby season where Australian sides were 0-26 against Kwi opposition. The return of inside-back Beale for his first Test since the World Cup final with New Zealand at Twickenham on October 30, 2015, is seen as a boost for the ailing Aussies. — AFP