COLOMBO-March 16 - At least five Sri Lankan policemen were killed and several wounded when Tamil Tiger rebels detonated a mine hitting a convoy carrying security personnel in eastern Sri Lanka on Thursday, the military spokesman said.

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Brigadier Palitha Fernando told Reuters by phone that the convoy was carrying policemen and soldiers who were proceeding on home leave from the eastern city of Batticaloa when it got caught in the blast. Batticaloa town, which lies some 300 km (190 miles) east of the capital Colombo, is controlled by the government, but most of the remaining parts of the district are in the hands of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas. At least one vehicle was badly damaged and the wounded had been shifted to hospital. Further details were awaited, he added. The latest attack came days after at least 29 people were killed in Colombo when some eight heavily-armed LTTE rebels botched an attempt to hit a motorcade carrying top politicians. Meanwhile the defence ministry said in a statement on Thursday that troops had killed at least six LTTE rebels in fresh clashes in the government-controlled northern Jaffna peninsula. It said the fighting in Jaffna occurred on Wednesday. The LTTE is fighting for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in the island's north and east. More than 60,000 people have been killed since the conflict began in 1983.

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