Tragic death of seven students of Assam Engineering College in a road mishap laid bare lax security measures in the premier institute that allowed boarders to slip out on a midnight adventure. Apart from quality education, healthy academic atmosphere, safety of students residing in hostels as well as day scholars within the campus must be of paramount importance for any educational institution. Parents send their children to study in residential institutes with the expectation that the authorities would ensure that campus life would be safe and disciplined, apart from being vibrant with academic, sports and extracurricular activities. Undergraduate courses groom students to pursue their career goals while only bright and talented students make it to the professional courses after clearing competitive entrance examinations. Death of the seven AEC students have left their parents shattered and no words of consolation would ever take away the pain and trauma they have suffered. It is also huge loss of state and the country's human resource as their contributions as engineering graduates would have been immense and much needed. While primary cause of the accident is rash and irresponsible driving on highway, it has left many questions unanswered. How could the students come out of the hostel past midnight for a ride on a Sport Utility Vehicle reportedly taken on rent by them without being noticed by the hostel authorities? When incidents of some hostel boarders of other premier educational institutions in the state slipping out of the campus at night and indulging in quarrel on the streets hit the headlines, did AEC authorities review the security measures of the hostel and the campus and initiated any action plan to plug the loopholes? These and other questions asked by parents of the deceased students and other family members are legitimate and the AEC authorities coming out with clear answers is vital to allaying apprehensions of parents of other hostel boarders. The AEC authorities have instituted a probe into incident. The probe panel apart from finding out how the ten students of a hostel managed to slip out, need to address the larger question of securing the campus and enforcing strict discipline for hostel boarders as well as day scholars. Apparently, the AEC authorities left the hostel security to hostel committees and self-discipline of boarders. There was no oversight mechanism to

undertake periodic review if the system was found to be effective and ensure that no boarder cannot move out of the campus without the permission of the hostel superintendent. A second layer of the security must be put in place so that security personnel manning the main entrance/exits can verify if a particular student who had arrived late or moving out of the campus had the mandatory permission from the hostel superintendent or not, and immediately notify the hostel and institution authorities in the event of any discrepancy. Poor security measures of the AEC campus also make the hostel boarders or day scholars vulnerable as miscreants from outside could enter the campus at any time and create trouble. Why this was overlooked is baffling. Private settlement within the AEC campus and residents from these settlements objecting to restrictive entry at the main entrance citied by the authorities is a genuine problem posing hurdles for the authorities in putting in place the desired security layers. The security issues escaping the District Administration as well as police authorities also point towards gaps in review of security of educational institutions. Regular review of security measures of educational campuses in the city will reveal the vulnerabilities and accordingly solutions to problems specific to each campus can be articulated and acted upon. The state government, the Assam Science and Technology University to which the AEC and other engineering colleges and other technical institutions are affiliated taking up the issue of campus security on priority basis can help find solution to the issue of arranging a foolproof security of AEC campus through creation of separate entry/exit for the college. Police investigating the accident sharing the details such as deployment of airbags after collision, if seat belts were buckled by the driver and other occupants etc. can be useful to remind car owners, drivers and passengers about the importance of wearing the seat belts to prevent fatalities in road mishap. The airbags deploy only if the seat belt is worn but many drivers and front seat passengers ignore seat belt alarms and some manage to bypass the automatic safety mechanism by installing devices available on online marketing platforms. The problem needs two-pronged approach- building awareness against rash driving, use of seat belts, adoption other safety measures, and strict

enforcement of traffic norms. Lessons must be learnt from the tragic demise of the AEC students and beefing up security measures in all educational campuses in the state is the need of the hour