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Pvt varsities galore, but none fulfils criteria

None of country's 54 private universities fulfil all the criteria required for registration under the Private University Act. They lack their own campus, faculty members, library or laboratory facilities, according to educational experts, reports BSS.

The 1992 legislation stipulates that every private university should have five acres of land and be housed on a permanent campus within five years of operation.

Some universities have obtained land in the suburbs of Dhaka, but the only one to have started on its permanent campus is the North South University (NSU).

Noted educationist Prof Muzaffar Ahmad accused a section of private universities of being interested only in earning money rather building proper infrastructures. "They are not universities, they are merely tutorial homes," he said.

When the first private university, North South, was launched, the entrepreneurs behind it said the aims of the new institution were to provide quality education to many students who go abroad each year and save foreign currency for the nation.

But most of the new private institutions still operate on temporary sites. Some do not even rent their own buildings but share space on a shift basis with other private educational establishments. Bangladesh University, for example, shares space with Mohammadpur Preparatory

School.

Others run alongside garment factories and commercial firms. Abedin Tower in Banani houses Queens University, offices and a garments factory. Darul Ihsan University's computer science department is sited in the midst of flats in the Dhanmondi area.

"Because universities do not have adequate space of their own, many have refrained from buying books and laboratory equipment," an educational expert claimed.

The East West University library is alone in addressing the problem of shortage of space by subscribing to online libraries, enabling students to access books through the Internet.

Some other private universities, however, provide books only related to their curriculum but additional extra curriculum books for widening knowledge is not available.

Prof. Jahedul Islam of Dhaka University believes the government's decision to retain Tk 5 crore from new universities as a guarantee, instead of the previous Tk 1 crore acted as a barrier to the participation of real educationists in this field.

He said private universities were making a positive contribution to the country's education sector, but would be helped if the government lowered the guarantee payment and allowed private universities with small campuses to function.