

US has concerns over digital, social media regulations: Haas

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Online Desk: US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas on Sunday said the United States government does have concerns about the regulations for digital, social media, and over-the-top platforms the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission and the Ministry of Information have introduced, as well as the draft Data Protection Act, or DPA

The US envoy made the remarks while speaking at a panel discussion on “Online Freedom and Business Investment in Bangladesh” at EMK Center in Dhaka. Ambassador Haas said development and security must be balanced with democracy and human rights. Protecting human rights and upholding democracy strengthens a country’s economy and brings sustainable, inclusive prosperity, he said. “We are encouraged that the government of Bangladesh continues to consult with commercial and business entities, civil society, and international partners on these topics. This openness is commendable,” said the US envoy.

Ambassador Peter Haas, British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Robert Chatterton Dickson, International Labour Organization Country Director Tuomo Poutiainen, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman and Country Managing Director, Oracle Bangladesh Rubaba Dowla discussed ways to promote online freedom, data protection, and business investment in Bangladesh. The US envoy said they sincerely hope that the next draft of the Data Protection Act incorporates feedback from these many sectors.

“We believe Bangladesh will be better for it. We firmly believe that an appropriate balance between international data protection standards, economic connectivity, and individual rights will facilitate this country’s continued development,” he said, adding that, “We are steadfast partners of Bangladesh and want to see its success.” Haas said Bangladesh’s aspiration to transition from Digital Bangladesh to Smart Bangladesh highlights its ambition to play a key role in the digital world of this century.

He said no country can succeed in this century without spurring foreign direct investment and innovation. “We’ve heard from U.S. businesses about their desire to grow and invest and grow their business here. The Bangladesh market is very attractive,” Haas said. He said they hear apprehension from businesses that proposed new laws and regulations in the digital space will make it more difficult for them to do business here.

“We worry the Data Protection Act, if passed with strict data localization requirements, may force some U.S. companies currently operating in Bangladesh to leave the market,” said the US envoy. He said the latest draft of the DPA does not provide for an independent data oversight authority and that it includes criminal penalties. “While each country must design laws that apply in its local context, there are clear international standards we urge all countries, including Bangladesh, to uphold,” he said.