

Murtaza Ali Shah

Queen appoints Pak businessman as member House of Lords

LONDON: British Pakistani businessperson Zameer Choudhrey, Chief Executive of Bestway Group has been appointed to the House of Lords under the Queen's intention of conferring Peerages of the United Kingdom.

In an announcement made by former Prime Minister Theresa May recognised key political aides, a sporting hero and business leaders in her resignation honour list. Zameer Choudhrey's appointment as the Lord is a huge honour for Pakistan and recognition of the hard work of Pakistanis in Britain.

Choudhrey CBE is the nephew of Sir Anwar Pervez, the founder of Bestway group. He will formally take oath as a member of the House of Lord in a few weeks. Zameer Chaudrey hails from Gujjar Khan, a place near Rawalpindi, and retains strong business and cultural ties to Pakistan.

The appointment as member of the House of Lords is in recognition of Choudhrey's considerable contributions to Britain's domestic and foreign trade as a leading businessman and entrepreneur, his wide array of philanthropic work both in the UK and abroad, and his role as Chairman of the Conservative Friends of Pakistan.

In total 40 people have received gongs, including David Beckham, Sir Geoffrey Boycott OBE and Cressida Dick. Speaking to Geo News, Choudhrey said, "It is an immense honour. I am truly humbled to have been appointed to the House of Lords. I have always viewed the UK to be the land of opportunity and I look forward to contributing to the continued advancement of our great country."

As Chief Executive of Bestway Group, Choudhrey has already driven tremendous growth in businesses across the UK and Pakistan. This led to Choudhrey being appointed to Deputy Chairman of the Pakistan Britain Trade & Investment Forum and serving as a member of the Confederation of British Industry's Economic Affairs Committee in previous years. He has worked extensively in his capacity as a Conservative Party influence to take up the case of Pakistan. Around two months ago, he was in Pakistan to meet Prime Minister Imran Khan with Brenden Lewis, chairman of the Conservative Party.

He has also regularly been asked to facilitate private government visits to both Pakistan and the UK for senior government officials from both countries, including the Mayors of London and the West Midlands, and private investors, to discuss how both the UK and Pakistan can look to increase trade and investment. These strong ties with Pakistan will mean Choudhrey will be looking to utilise his vast experience to build more bilateral trade, create more jobs here in the UK and improve foreign relations between our two countries.

Choudhrey comes from humble beginnings having grown up in a remote village in Pakistan, before moving to the UK at the age of 12. His remarkable success over his career led to him being appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the 2016 New Year's Honours List for services to industry and philanthropy.

He also sits as a trustee for several national charities, including CrimeStoppers, Grocery Aid and Bestway Foundation, which has donated over £30 million to worthy education and healthcare causes. In January 2018, he was appointed as UK Chair of the British Asian Trust's Advisory Council, by HRH The Prince of Wales.

In his role as Chief Executive of Bestway Group, Choudrey has overseen the growth of the Group into one of the UK's largest family-owned businesses, which employs over 27,000 people worldwide. In the UK, Bestway Group currently provides employment for 15,000 people.

Under Choudrey's stewardship, Bestway Group has become the largest British investor and philanthropic contributor in Pakistan, and gained recognition from the President of Pakistan in 2018, with a prestigious Pakistani civil award, the 'Sitara-e-Imtiaz' (Star of Excellence).

In addition to the UK businesses, Choudrey has spearheaded tremendous growth and investment abroad with the two arms of Bestway Group that operate in Pakistan – United Bank Limited, the 2nd largest private bank in Pakistan and Bestway Cement, Pakistan's largest cement manufacturer. The success of these businesses has shown him to have an astute understanding of the financial services sector, as well as of infrastructure and foreign trade.

Bestway Group was founded in 1963 by Sir Anwar Pervez OBE HPk. It is the UK's 18th largest privately-owned company and 7th largest family owned business. The Group consists of: Bestway Wholesale, the largest independent wholesaler in the UK; recently acquired Bestway Retail, which services approximately 760 franchise and corporate convenience stores; Well Pharmacy, the third largest pharmacy business in the UK; Bestway Cement, the largest cement manufacturer in Pakistan; and United Bank Limited, the 2nd largest private bank in Pakistan. The company has a global workforce of over 27,000 people, including 15,000 in the UK alone.

Bestway Cement, founded by Bestway Group in 1995 as a greenfield site, is now Pakistan's largest cement manufacturer with an annual capacity of 10.8 million tonnes. United Bank Limited, Pakistan's second largest private bank with assets under management of US\$14.6 billion and a branch network of over 1,400 branches serving over five million customers.

The House of Lords, also known as the House of Peers, is the Upper House of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. Unlike the elected House of Commons, members of the House of Lords (excluding 90 hereditary peers) are appointed.

The Commons is an elected body consisting of 650 members known as Members of Parliament (MPs). Peers would be limited to 15 years in the House of Lords as part of plans to cut membership by a quarter from the current 800 over the next decade. The total size of the House of Commons will be reduced to 600 only in coming years.

The House of Lords scrutinizes bills that have been approved by the House of Commons. It regularly reviews and amends Bills from the Commons. While it is unable to prevent Bills passing into law, except in certain limited circumstances, it can delay Bills and force the Commons to reconsider their decisions. In this capacity, the House of Lords acts as a check on the House of Commons that is independent from the electoral process.