

Observer

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Sultanate wins two UN awards

By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — Oman's Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Manpower have both been named esteemed recipients of the prestigious 2010 United Nations Public Service Award (UNPSA). The winners will be honoured at the 2010 UNPSA Awards Ceremony in Barcelona, Spain, in June.

The Ministry of Health was a first-place winner with the 'Al Shifa Healthcare Information Management System' in the category of 'Advancing Knowledge Management in Government'. As well, the Ministry of Manpower finished in second place in the category of 'Improving the Delivery of Public Services' with its 'Manpower Registration System'.

The UN Public Service Award recognises the creative achievements and contributions of public service institutions that lead to a more effective and responsive

public service administration in countries worldwide. Through an annual competition, the UN Public Service Awards promote the role, professionalism, and visibility of public service.

It is important to note that each year there are only four categories with two winners per category each year.

Mohammed bin Hassan bin Ali, Under-Secretary for Planning Affairs, Ministry of Health, said: "This award comes as a result of hard work by the Ministry of Health to develop its eServices. The ministry cares deeply about eHealth services and how to best manage health information through using information technology.

Al Shifa, a comprehensive healthcare information management system, is a complete solution developed to electronically manage details about patients' healthcare information, in addition to maintaining

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non-medical systems like the blood bank, pharmacy supplies, x-ray departments, and emergency medical stores. Accessible throughout the Sultanate, the system essentially eliminates the old-fashioned pen and paper system as a means of intra-departmental communication. Winning the 2010 UNPSA is reward for the dedication of all medical and IT staff who have invested in the project."

Only very few countries have won a United Nations Public Service Award since its inception in 2003, yet Oman has successfully managed to win this award in 2003, in 2009, and now again in 2010, thrice.

In 2003, Oman won the UNPS Award for the 'Cleanliness of Muscat Municipality' in the 'Improvement of Public Services' category, and last year, in 2009, the Sultanate again won the UNPS Award for the ROP 'National Registration System' in the 'Improving the Delivery of Services' category.

Similar to other years, this year the United Nations Public Service Awards were awarded in the following four categories: (i) Improving transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in the public service, (ii) Improving the delivery of services, (iii) Fostering participation in policy-making decisions through innovative mechanisms, and (iv) Advancing knowledge management in government.

Until development of the electronic Manpower Registration System, the hiring of foreign workers was very tedious and time-consuming; sometimes taking between 1-3 months to process work permits. Today, it takes only one week to receive a work permit from the time of submission. As well, through the new system companies can easily update their foreign workers' information more regularly.

When contacted for comment, Dr Younis al Akhzami,



General Manager of Planning and Development, at the Ministry of Manpower had this to say, "We can add this achievement to the many achievements which have come as part of the government's vision and the e.oman Initiative to develop information technology in the Sultanate. We are also proud that Oman has won again in a competition where many countries participating have more experience in this area."

He added, "The Ministry of Manpower began many years ago to develop its eServices in an effort to help citizens in the private sector whereby citizens can avail themselves of the eServices from home or business. We will keep working to further improve the eServices at the Ministry of Manpower."

Oman's two awards will be handed out at the 2010 UNPS Awards Ceremony to be held on June 23, in Barcelona, Spain, to coincide with the United Nations Public Service Day, as happens every year.

In addition to the awards ceremony there will also be a forum on the 'Role of Public Service Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: Challenges and Best Practices'. This event is organised by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA),

in collaboration with the Directorate General for Citizen Participation of the Government of Catalonia in Spain. The Deputy Prime Minister of Spain will open the awards ceremony. The President of the United Nations General Assembly and other high-level government officials from around the world are expected to give out the awards.

Dr Salim al Ruzaiqi, CEO of the Information Technology Authority (ITA), the national authority responsible for implementing e.oman projects and initiatives, offered this comment: "These two United Nations Public Service Awards are an outstanding achievement for Oman and will encourage the government sectors to continue to develop and increase the number of available eServices."

In addition, this will help all of us to implement e.oman projects and initiatives throughout Oman. It is hoped that with this achievement other similar significant achievements in the development of eServices will soon follow."

Oman's winning entries for this award exemplifies the excellence the country has achieved in harnessing technology to serve the community at large. It is a great achievement for the Sultanate as this award is the most prestigious international recognition of excellence in public service.