

Bahrain electronic ID card project

||||| Towards a better future



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The context

The Kingdom of Bahrain is an island state in the Arabian Gulf covering just 257 square miles. With a population of around one million, Bahrain consistently figures as one of the top Middle Eastern countries in the United Nations Development Program's annual index on human development.

The Kingdom of Bahrain announced the start of an eGovernment initiative in 2004. The Central Informatics Organization (CIO) was charged with implementing a smart card-based eID project as well as improving existing infrastructure, equipment, programs and procedures to bring the Kingdom in line with latest technologies.

The challenges

The CIO plays a leading role in enhancing the quality of life for citizens of the kingdom of Bahrain through comprehensive, secure, accurate and timely information and services. As part of the wider eGovernment project, the Kingdom of Bahrain decided to initiate a project to issue a multi-purpose ID document to replace the old paper-based Central Population Register (CPR) card which was initiated by CIO back in 1984 and has now evolved to become the core national data set.

With the Kingdom's increasing focus on customer service delivery, it was imperative to develop a kingdom-wide strategy to harness synergies developed. It was also key to develop capabilities in various government institutions so that eGovernment initiatives – both current and future – can be implemented successfully. Careful planning of the provision of different services was also critical to channel limited resources in the right direction. Lastly, effective monitoring and evaluation of each part of the project was key to ensuring that the right outcomes are delivered in all fields.

As part of the national eGovernment project, the Bahraini ID card had to fulfill these challenges and ensure a better future for Bahraini citizens. It had to provide them with a secure and user-friendly ID and travel document and the best possible tool for procuring eGovernment services quickly and simply and with the highest standards of security and privacy.

“The ID card project is a Bahraini aspiration towards a better future for the Kingdom and aims to provide better tools for procuring electronic government services which are available and provided to citizens.”

**Dr Mohammed Al-Amer,
President of CIO**

The solution

The new ID cards being issued by the CIO to every citizen and resident in the Kingdom of Bahrain include built-in biometrics such as fingerprint information as well as the holder's photograph and signature, allowing for fast and secure verification of the holder's identity. The cards also include contact and contactless technologies and have a range of software and security features embedded in a Java™ microprocessor for accessing the Kingdom's eGovernment services. The contactless technology combines with the match-on card biometric capability allows the cards to be used as travel documents, increasing the speed, convenience and security of ID verification at border crossings.

The credit card-sized ID cards prominently feature red and white colors as a representative of the

Kingdom's flag. They also include guilloche patterns, rainbows, and a raft of anti-tampering and forgery printing solutions.



Involved with the project since September 2007, Gemalto will be delivering an additional one million of its latest generation eID cards for citizens in 2009. Gemalto is also providing consultancy on smart card-related solutions including Public Key Infrastructure (PKI), smart card applications and training.

The results

These high-end ID cards, combining built-in biometrics and contact and contactless technologies are now being issued to all citizens and residents of the Kingdom of Bahrain and have a maximum validity of five years.

The cards are also used as a driver license and a travel document, increasing the speed, convenience and security of identity verification at border crossings. Moreover, the Bahrain ID cards can also be used to carry medical information, including URLs linked to the holder's electronic medical files and vaccination history. They can store a large amount of data opening the way to faster and easier access to eGovernment services through a simple home card reader, and have the potential for ePurse, secure access and voting applications.