TECHNICAL ASPECTS RELATED TO FUNCTIONS

1.   It would be a major undertaking to discuss the numerous technical aspects which could possibly be involved in an information storage and retrieval system for External Affairs. A more manageable discussion of the technical aspects would stem from a knowledge of the functions which must be put in place in order to provide the envisaged system, and so this approach has been chosen.

2.   The features which will be discussed in this Annex are based on the determined needs of an External Affairs information system and an examination of the very few working systems similar in purpose to that required for External Affairs. These are as follows:

- Unique number assignment to each item entering the system.

- Controlled entry of documents into the system.

- Retention of the present subject files approach to information-handling.

- Availability of full text for all items within the system.

- The need for a separate group of qualified personnel to perform indexing and retrieval of information.

3.   It will be noted that the list of features is not exhaustive but comprises only those which, at this point in time, have been considered as probable components of the eventual system.

Unique Number Assignment

4.   Assigning a unique number to each document is necessary for the purpose of retrieval and adequate control over information entering the system.

5.   This assignment can be handled in a number of ways. For example, where a unique number is already being assigned, such as for telegrams, this existing procedure could be absorbed into the system. This might result in a series of numbers, not necessarily unique. To avoid duplication between series, a prefix would need to be attached to uniquely identify that series.

6.   The problem with such an approach is that of control, since assignment of numbers for different categories of material would probably be carried out by different groups, each with its own specific needs to be met. Furthermore, not all communications assigned numbers in this manner would reach the system. For example, ITC messages to ITC HQ passing through the External Affairs Comcentre, or non-substantive material of an administrative nature would receive numbers but would not enter the system. Excluding such items would leave gaps in the numbering system, further deteriorating control.