

Handling of information

The increasing communications requirements of this and other government departments under conditions of severe financial restraint put available resources under great pressure. To maintain rapid and efficient telecommunications services in the face of such difficulties, the program to up-date obsolete equipment throughout the world-wide network was intensified. Its full implementation over the next two years will result in significant savings.

At departmental headquarters, the installation of a digital message-switch was an immediate success, as its ability to handle the peak Olympic Games traffic during the normal summer reduction of staff strikingly demonstrated. Consequently studies were initiated for the purpose of expanding the switch's capacity to take advantage of a new tariff structure for circuits leased abroad. The object of all these changes was to reduce costly relay work abroad by establishing more direct communications between posts and Ottawa. New automated "input-output" devices for the switch are also being examined with a view to greater efficiency and economy. In the teleprinter and cryptographic areas, the development of interfaces and terminals proceeded in the expectation of early "first deliveries" under the re-equipment program started in 1975. Radio-teletype was introduced at two posts and, while a number of problems have reduced its usefulness at this early stage, the basic merit of radio for use in certain cases — particularly where commercial-circuit costs are high — has been clearly demonstrated.

The first steps were taken to implement the information-storage and -retrieval system for which approval in principle had been given in 1975. The key elements of the system include the decentralization of the records-management function, the introduction of computer facilities to index the full flow of material on foreign policy, and the conversion of the closed volumes of the Department's files to microfiche. Computerized indexing will ensure that all documents on a given subject are

quickly identified, while decentralization of the records service, combined with the use of microfiche, will ensure that all bureaux have rapid access to the information contained in the Department's files.

A description of the operation of the system, with its general specifications, accompanied the invitations to tender for the computer component of the system. While this part of the project was under way, a small team was assembled to draw up the glossary that would provide the essential basis for "on-line" computerized indexing.

While the information-systems program was being developed, a number of complementary changes were being introduced in the Records Management Division. Mail operations were strengthened and co-ordinated more closely with the diplomatic courier service. A micrographic unit was set up to microfilm and duplicate departmental records and many other basic documents. To economize on manpower, a special high-speed microfiche camera was installed, which will probably increase savings and convenience in many areas. The first steps were taken to set up a separate section, which would be associated with the micrographic unit, to prepare some 30,000 subject files for conversion to microfiche.

Library

December 31, 1976, brought to a close the Library's third year in the Lester B. Pearson Building, and provided a vantage-point from which to review the progress made since the Library had moved into its permanent quarters. During its earlier days, the Library, which was itself housed in totally inadequate space, had constantly to face the nearly impossible task of serving a fragmented department distributed throughout 13 buildings. The planning that was so carefully done for the best use of an attractive location in the new building has had excellent results, and a much-improved service is now available to the Department, both at its headquarters in Ottawa and at its posts abroad. A sound foundation has been laid for the development