

Russia yesterday moved to prevent military action against Iraq as the US and Britain edged closer to using force to break the deadlock over arms inspections. Dismissing a military strike against Iraq as "unacceptable and counter-productive", Russia yesterday sent its special Middle East envoy to Baghdad.

"All further steps on Iraq should be taken strictly in accordance with decisions by the UN Security Council and be of a political nature," said the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman.

James Rubin, State Department spokesman, said time was "running out" for a diplomatic solution.

The remarks reveal deep splits among the five permanent council members. Russia, China and France oppose military action; the US and Britain, on the other, are increasingly convinced force may be the only way to compel Iraq to comply with UN demands for unrestricted access to suspected

three aircraft carriers in the Gulf which have 350 aircraft.

By ordering Victor Posavalyuk, his special envoy and deputy foreign minister, to fly to Baghdad, President Boris Yeltsin clearly aimed to pre-empt the use of force and repeat Russia's success of last November when Yevgeny Primakov, Russian foreign minister, deflated the crisis over the composition of UN inspections teams.

Russia, China and France have

and ease Iraqi concerns, each country has offered its own experts to work in Uncom.

They also urge the early lifting of sanctions against Iraq, imposed after Baghdad invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Iraq has accused the US of wanting to keep sanctions in place indefinitely. Sanctions cannot be lifted until the UN certifies a clean bill of health.

Russia's Foreign Ministry

Favourite still has to fight off challengers as executive board votes today

Brundtland tipped to head WHO

By Frances Williams in Geneva

Gro Harlem Brundtland, former prime minister of Norway, goes into the final furlong firm favourite in the race to succeed Hiroshi Nakajima of Japan as next head of the World Health Organisation when the WHO's executive board votes today.

Yet her victory is by no means assured. She faces strong competition, notably from Nafis Sadik of Pakistan, who now heads the United Nations Population Fund in New York, as well as from three of the WHO's regional directors: Sir George Alleyne of Barbados (Americas), Ebrahim Samia of Gambia (Africa), and Utton Nuchiar Rafei of Indonesia (southeast Asia).

Moreover, as a European woman, Brundtland could be handicapped by the recent appointment of two women from the industrialised world to leading UN posts: Mary Robinson of Ireland as human rights supreme and Louise Prech-

ette of Canada as deputy secretary general.

Dr Brundtland, 53, a qualified medical doctor who was three times Norway's prime minister, has tried to avoid being labelled as the candidate of the north, though she has the backing of the US and European nations.

They believe that she has the charisma and leadership qualities the WHO lacks at present.

Her campaign has aimed to build on the respect she already commands in the developing world, especially for her work as chairman of the United Nations commission on environment and development in the 1980s.

It was the commission's report which fleshed out the idea of "sustainable development". However, the executive board's opaque voting system is capable of upsetting the best-run campaign.

The 32 members, chosen from the WHO's 191 members on a rotating basis reflecting a balance of the regions, act in their personal capacities and will vote by secret ballot.

alties, the possibility exists for elimination of a preferred candidate.

The US, for instance, which publicly proclaimed its support for Dr Brundtland last week, is not at present an executive board member.

The board's nominee must be confirmed by the full World Health Assembly in May ahead of Dr Nakajima's retirement in July after two five-year terms. But it would be unprecedented for a non-nation to be rejected.

The system evidently leaves plenty of room for horse-trading. Allegations of vote-buying clouded the re-election of Dr Nakajima for a second five-year term in 1993, which was opposed by the western industrialised countries.

This time was supposed to be different but even so, the WHO corridors are seething with unsubstantiated rumours of deals. "They are being made at all kinds of levels," said one observer, adding ironically: "It's just like a good old-fashioned political campaign."



NEW J. GALEY

Drundtland: victory is by no means assured

If no candidate receives an outright majority on the first ballot, the candidate with the fewest votes drops out and the executive board bal-

lots again - and again until a candidate emerges with a majority. Since the first ballot is likely to reflect regional loy-

NEWS DIGEST

Jordan tough pr

Jordan's Supreme Court yesterday pushed through by decree undermined the country's gradual democratisation.

The court ruling said the pre-constitutional, a decision of opposition parties which boycotted parliamentary elections in procedures.

The press law was aimed at and critical media by increasing capital from JD15,000 to JD300 particularly weeklies which it and which were critical of Jordan, were forced to close as result.

JEWISH CONVERSION

Bill set to be d

Attempts by Israel's Orthodox through a bill making only Orthodox look set to be defeated as parliament support to oppose a Deputy are concerned a Israel and the diaspora apart between secular, progressive Reform and Conservative outside Israel.

Shas, the ultra-Orthodox Netanyahu's governing coalition press ahead with the conversion Chief Rabbinate replies to a Neeman, the finance minister a compromise giving the pro-conservative movements candidates for conversions, conversion to be conducted in

Brundtland in elephantiasis venture

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