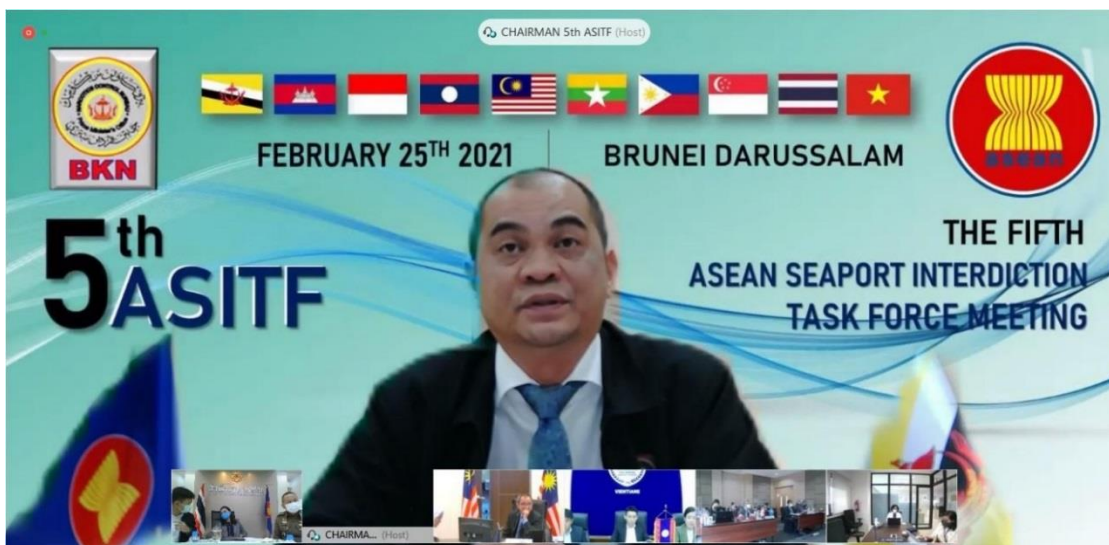




The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) of Brunei Darussalam hosted the 5th ASEAN Seaport Interdiction Task Force (ASITF) Meeting by video conference owing to the COVID-19 pandemic on 25th February 2021 at 9:00 a.m. (Brunei local time).



The meeting was opened by Mr. Zalani bin Haji Ismail, Director of NCB, and chaired by Mr. Zainol Adi Ajmain, Assistant Director of Enforcement and Intelligence Division, NCB. The meeting was attended by 9 ASEAN Member States except Myanmar because of the unrest situation in the country and a representative of the ASEAN Secretariat.



Viet Nam, the host and the Chair of the 4th ASITF, reported the outcome of the previous ASITF Meeting in 2019 which he emphasized that ASEAN Member States needed more further cooperation and handed over the chairmanship of the 5th ASITF Meeting to the in-coming Chair, Brunei Darussalam.



During the meeting, ASEAN Member States exchanged and discussed drug situations, in particular, illicit drug trafficking by sea, modus operandi of drug syndicates in their seaports, drug control methods, as well as proposed the recommendations for future collaboration among the Member States. According to drug situation in ASEAN region, it was found that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, illicit drug smuggling by sea routes tended to increase, as the ASEAN Member States had imposed their border restriction and limited international traveling /flights. Methamphetamine (Syabu) remains prevalent and is serious issue in ASEAN region. Furthermore, all Member States proposed that there should be training for the frontline officers, more technologies should be utilized for the merchandise inspection, and should improve the real-time intelligence sharing owing to the fact that drug syndicates regularly change their smuggling patterns. As a result, the meeting glorified that the ASEAN Member States should employ other communication platforms besides WhatsApp group chat for more efficient information sharing. It was further recommended that every ASEAN Member States should adopt innovative technologies to fortify the country's international seaports to become the "Smart Seaports." In 2022, the 6th ASITF Meeting will be hosted by Cambodia.