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MAHATHIR MIGHT DISCUSS EAEC WITH HIS AUSTRALIAN COUNTERPART

BINTULU, March 16 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said he might discuss the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) with his Australian counterpart John Howard during his stopover visit to Australia on March 29.

The Prime Minister said he would discuss everything when he meets Howard, the newly-elected Australian Prime Minister and that would include the EAEC.

"We hope Australia will persuade the Americans not to be unduly obstructive (over the formation of EAEC)," he told reporters following a visit to the site for the Bakun hydro-electric dam project.

The previous Australian government under Prime Minister Paul Keating viewed the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) as the best alternative for EAEC.

The Australian press hailed Dr Mahathir's agreement to meet Howard as a morale booster for the new Australian government which was trying to build links with Asia.

Dr Mahathir said he did not want to get involved in Australian politics but at the same time he felt that he would be discourteous to refuse Howard's invitation to meet him.

He said he was just passing through Australia on his way home from an official visit to New Zealand. -- BERNAMA

AHM LDB