

Asian businesses upbeat on economy

By Kevin Brown in Singapore

Asian business leaders are confident about economic recovery, according to a survey of companies that have a market capitalisation of more than \$1,000bn.

The survey, which will be published this week by the Asia Business Council, an independent grouping for regional chief executives, found that 67 per cent think the economy will improve compared with just 6 per cent fearing it will worsen.

The results are a sharp reversal of a similar survey conducted a year ago, when 75 per cent expected a deterioration in the regional economy compared with 6 per cent who forecast an improvement.

The council, chaired by Qin Xiao, chairman of China Merchants group, includes regional business leaders such as Jack Ma, chairman of China's Alibaba internet trading group, Michael Smith, chief executive of Australia's

ANZ Bank, and Junichi Ujiie, chairman of Japan's Nomura Holdings.

The group also includes non-Asian business leaders with interests in the region, including Daniel Vasella, chief executive of Novartis, the Swiss pharmaceutical company, Bruno Lafont, chief executive of Lafarge, the French cement maker, and John Rose, chief executive of Rolls-Royce, the UK maker of aircraft engines.

Responses were received from 52 of the council's 70 members, but it is not possible to identify an individual's views from the results.

The survey, which was conducted between June and August, also found growing interest in investing in Indonesia, south-east Asia's biggest economy, alongside China and India. The largest foreign investments identified in the results were in telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, construction, metal and electronics.