SINGAPORE: Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said if the growth estimates for this year materialise, Singapore will see its worst economic performance in decades. As a response to the crisis, Mr Lee said the government's Budget to be announced on Thursday will not be an ordinary one.

Speaking at a dinner to mark a decade of partnership between the National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) on Wednesday, Mr Lee said the Budget's focus will be to keep companies afloat so that they can provide jobs for Singaporeans.

So there will be special schemes to help businesses reduce costs and gain access to urgently-needed financing.

He added that the Budget will also have measures to help households, especially needy families.

Mr Lee said: "The Budget will not turn around our situation overnight. No government package can do that. But it will help us to see through this difficult period and emerge stronger.

"But even under the best scenario, we have to be prepared for a long recession and probably several years of slow growth thereafter."

Mr Lee said the Budget will have measures to prepare Singapore for the long term, like improving the country's competitive edge and building new capabilities.

He said Singapore will continue to invest steadily in education, research and development.

One such example currently in action is the Singapore-MIT Alliance, which started 10 years ago during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis.

The programme has produced some 780 graduates who have gone on to contribute in life sciences, pharmaceuticals and engineering.

Under the programme, S$48 million has been set aside to fund up to 100 scholars to carry out work at the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology (SMART) over the next five years. - CNA/vm