Many experts are worried that an ancient pagoda in Ayutthaya might come tumbling down because its base has been found to be severely damp, Soamsuda Leeyawanich, director general of the Fine Arts Department, said yesterday.

She was inspecting historical sites in Ayutthaya with experts from the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco).

Ayutthaya, which was granted the World Heritage status in 1991, was one of the many provinces devastated by one of the worst floods in decades.

"There is concern that the base may no longer be strong enough to carry the weight of the [centuries old] pagoda," she said, adding that there were some signs of the top of the pagoda crumbling.

With flood waters slowly receding, large cracks are starting to be noticed in several statues and ancient structures that have been submerged for more than a month.

The most famous reclining Buddha in Wat Lokkaya-sutharam is also severely cracked.

Soamsuda said her department would spend more than Bt600 million (S$24.9 million) on repairing the 130 historical sites damaged by the floods.

She added that the Unesco team was gathering information to seek funding for the restoration.

So far, the UN agency has approved US$72,000 (Bt2.24 million) in initial assistance.

"Unesco will review all the relevant information to consider additional grants if the government makes a request," Soamsuda explained, adding that the team of experts had also provided useful advice on how to restore the sites in line with international standards.

Archaeology expert Toko Futagami said she would examine the brick walls of Wat Phra Si Sanphat before providing guidelines on how to deal with the moss and water stains.

Some ancient structures like Wat Chaiwattanaram are still flooded, though Chaiyanand Busayarat, director of the Ayutthaya Historical Park, said he hoped the waters would recede by next week.

"After that inspections can be conducted to determine the damages," he said. As of yesterday, the area was under nearly a metre of water.

Culture Minister Sukumol Kunplome said her ministry was planning to seek more than Bt1.4 billion for the restoration of 313 historical sites damaged by floods across the country.
"The Culture Ministry will make the request at the Cabinet meeting next week," she said.

According to her, a committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Yongyuth Wichaidit had already approved the list of these historical sites.