Ancient Ayutthaya temples at risk, Unesco warns

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Experts from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation said they found algae and salt stains on temple bricks during their post-flood survey of ancient sites in the province, Culture Minister Sukumol Kunplome revealed.

The Unesco experts from Italy, the Netherlands and Japan this week surveyed many historic sites in the province, including Wat Phra Sri Sanphet, Wat Mahathat and Wat Chaiwattanaram.

They also discovered salt stains and fungi on ancient murals on the walls inside sermon halls and Ubosot halls of many temples such as Wat Chang Yai, Wat Kasatratbirat Worawihan, Wat Pradusongtham, Wat Khanon Nua, Wat Yai Chumphol and Wat Cherng Tha, she said.

Fine Arts Department deputy director-general Anek Seehamart said algae were found between bricks at Wat Phra Sri Sanphet and Wat Chaiwattanaram.

Responding to concerns about the impact on the structures, Thai engineers said they were strong but they would check again while repairing them.

Experts on bricks from Japan would conduct a survey again in the middle of this month and give advice on how to deal with algae and salt stains.

Sukumol added that the Italian expert reported finding traces of nitrate salts on the walls and fungi, adding that fungi would cause corrosion over wider areas.

The paintings have been done with traditional techniques as the craftsmen did not have anti-corrosion coating technology. So, the ministry will have to repair them urgently.

In addition to the historic temples, nine mosques and the Portuguese Village in the same province have been severely damaged. Authorities are trying to restore them.

Sukumol said that she and officials from the department will today visit Ayutthaya to survey the damage before reporting to Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra on how they could recover the affected ancient sites.

They would also try to promote those sites, which are more than 400 years old, among foreign tourists to woo them back.

As a long-term prevention measure, the experts urged Thailand to dig and clear obstacles in canals and provide more areas to store flood waters so as to ease the severity of floods that would affect residents there.