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LOS ALTOS HILLS, Calif.

The FBI is investigating a worldwide cult that runs yoga and meditation courses throughout the country on suspicion it is a foreign-based terrorist organization involved in bombings and murders, it was reported.

The Ananda Marga Yoga Society, which operates medical clinics, nursery schools and feeding programs for the poor at many of its 38 U.S. centers, including one in secluded Los Altos Hills, just 40 miles south of San Francisco, is suspected of leaving a trail of blood and tears around the world, the San Jose Mercury reported in a recent edition.

A Gestapo-like branch of the cult has attacked political enemies with bombs, knives and grenades both in the U.S. and overseas, the newspaper quoted law enforcement agencies as saying. Three bystanders were killed in one Australian incident.

The State Department has identified paramilitary training camps run by the Ananda Marga in India, and the FBI is investigating reports that the group runs similar operations in the U.S., according to the report.

Cult members have stabbed victims in Los Angeles and Washington D.C., and firebombed a New York airline office, CIA and FBI documents show. Overseas, Ananda Marga has been tied to assassination attempts, hijackings and arson. Swedish police are seeking a cult member believed to have murdered a Boulder, Colo. man formerly associated with the group.

But it said the cult's guru, Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, known to his followers as "Baba," or "Father," has spent seven years in an Indian jail on charges he murdered six disloyal priests.

Ananda Marga denies taking part in any violence, and many of its members are oblivious to the allegations, the newspaper said.

The verdict was overturned in 1978 and he was released.

Meanwhile, seven cultists -- one in the U.S. -- had burned themselves to death in protest of his imprisonment.

The State Department, fearing Sarkar's presence might lead to more violence, has prohibited him from entering the United States, the newspaper reported.

To most of his followers, Sarkar is a "god" and the teachings of Ananda Marga are "a miracle."

But Nawal Kishore, a former high-ranking monk, wrote in 1975 that Sarkar is "a perverted megalomaniac" whose "murder squads" tied disloyal members to trees and fatally stabbed them.

"It became a frequent practice for the Anandamurti (Sarkar), sitting on a chair with a rod in his hand, to chastise errant (monks), all of them stripped naked," Kishore wrote. "He used to cane them one by one mercilessly ..., " the Mercury quoted Kishore as writing.

Homosexual activity and human skulls are part of the cult's foreign rituals, according to a CIA report, the newspaper said. One former member said his

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trainer in America carried two skulls in bowling bags.

' 'It is a fact that, under the guise of spiritual practices, Sarkar and his associates have been indulging in quite heinous crimes,' ' a CIA document was quoted.

Ananda Marga claims a worldwide following of 3 million members in 30 countries, with 20,000 disciples in the United States, but the State Department counters with its own estimates of only 400,000 members worldwide, with 5,000 of them in this country.

Cult critics say the Ananda Marga intentionally keeps a low profile in the U.S., running health food stores, daycare centers and yoga centers that double as training grounds for new members, in an effort to raise money and increase membership for overseas terrorist activities.