

## **Swamy Laxminarayan and the Founding of TITB**

All of us lost a very dear friend when Swamy Laxminarayan died. While I have many personal thoughts to share regarding his life, I was asked here to describe Swamy's role in the launching of this journal.

All IEEE publications need a sponsor. In this case, Swamy proposed to the Administrative Committee of the IEEE Engineering in Medicine and Biology Society that a journal in biomedical information technology was needed, and that EMBS should sponsor it. There was general agreement within AdCom that this was indeed a good idea.

Swamy asked me for a copy of the business plan that I had used in 1992 to launch the IEEE Transactions on Rehabilitation Engineering, and used that document as a template for his proposal. He came up with the catchy and very germane title of the IEEE Transactions on Biomedical Information Technology, or more aptly to be known as T-BIT. What a stroke of humorous and practical insight! Shannon and Turkey would have loved it. This was the title that we sent through the IEEE Technical Activities new publication vetting process.

The publication proposal contained the usual requirements that would be found in a typical business plan, but IEEE also required that some "proof of interest" be provided. To do this, Swamy assembled an esteemed group of Associate Editors, drawn from industry, academia and government from throughout the world. And, because of their belief in Swamy's vision, each committed to provide one or more papers to the journal's inaugural volume. The proposal was thus greatly strengthened by a listing of the exact titles of the papers that would be appearing in the first two issues, and commitments for the rest of volume 1.

As with any large organization, different entities have somewhat overlapping scopes. The IEEE Computer Society wanted a role in T-BIT. And the IEEE legal people told us that T-BIT was too close to another title on the market, so the name was changed to the IEEE Transactions on Information Technology in Biomedicine. But the Transactions were ultimately approved within all of the IEEE structure by June, so that it could begin publishing at the beginning of the next year.

Swamy also organized a conference in DC with the same theme as the Transactions, with the plan to use the conference to both attract papers for TITB and to raise awareness in the DC political arena that this was a hot topic field that was about to take off [He was correct, of course!]. The conference got more than the number of attendees predicted by Swamy. Follow-up conferences led to one with a focus on bio-terrorism and the bio-information infrastructure. That conference and the EMB Magazine special issue edited by Swamy and Luis Kun, put IEEE and IEEE EMBS in great respect in the US Congress and abroad.

In sum, regarding Swamy and TITB — he had a great vision, would not let the nay-sayers detract him from that vision, got great people worldwide enthused, got the journal started, and made it very widely respected internationally. His continued lament until the day he died was that certain people would attack his ideas personally, rather than on their merits. We talked about this only weeks before his death. Swamy was always frustrated by these cliques and it troubled him to his dying day. These transactions are a testament that his ideas did indeed have much merit. We will sorely miss him, and his vision.

Charlie Robinson  
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Founding Editor, IEEE Transactions on Rehabilitation Engineering  
And the role most deeply cherished – A dear and close friend to Swamy!