The Return of Imoke

Contributed by Obong Akpaekong
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Liyel Imoke, candidate of the People’s Democratic Party, PDP, wins the February 25, gubernatorial election to regain his seat

During the Cross River State governorship campaign rally of the Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, held at Udoakaha Jacob Esuene Stadium in Calabar, February 19, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, spotting a red T-shirt and a hat, stepped out of the VIP box dancing on the podium amidst applause. Once there, he grabbed the microphone to declare: “When your masquerade dances well, you have cause to rejoice. Liyel Imoke is the masquerade. He has danced well.” Obasanjo was, however, quick to add that Imoke would be back in Government House after the election of February 25, which was just seven days away. That assurance of victory for Imoke gained the former president another resounding applause. The Supreme Court had in January sacked Imoke for overstaying his four-year tenure. Adamawa, Bayelsa, Sokoto and Kogi states also lost their governors seats to that court outing. But true to Obasanjo’s word, Imoke won the elects on of February 25 with a landslide. He polled 451,544 or 90.11 percent of the 489, 939 valid votes cast to defeat Usani Usani, a pastor and candidate of Action Congress of Nigeria, ACN, who polled 31,026 votes to place second and Patrick Okomiso of All Nigeria Peoples Party, ANPP, who polled 2,235 votes to grab the third position. Dorothy Eyamba-Idem, the state chief judge, swore Imoke into office at a colourful ceremony in Calabar, the state capital last Tuesday, just two days after the election. At that occasion, Imoke said his administration would continue to upgrade education and health care facilities, provide infrastructure like roads, electricity and water supply, which he said, remained “integral to our objective of social transformation.” He earlier told journalists at his residence in Calabar hours after Joseph Epoke, vice chancellor of the University of Calabar and returning officer for the contest announced his victory, that his administration would focus more on service driven economy. “For us to be able to meet this target, we are going to attach more priority to the hospitality industry and development of knowledge economy including TINAPA,” he said. Ekpo Okon, PDP chairman in the state told Newswatch that Imoke’s victory was made easy by his works in the first four years. “When you go to our rural areas to see what he has done, you will understand why we appreciate him. In terms of asphalted rural roads, he has done about 1000 kilometres already. If you look at educational infrastructure, there is a whole lot of physical renovation of primary and secondary schools,” he said.