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Yashwant
Sinha joins
Trinamool

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Former Union Finance Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Yashwant Sinha on Saturday joined the Trinamool Congress. Senior leaders of the Trinamool, including Sudip Banerjee, Derek O'Brien and Subrata Mukherjee welcomed Mr. Sinha into the party.

Before officially joining the party, Mr. Sinha met its chairperson and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for nearly 45 minutes at her Kalighat residence.

Mr. Sinha, once one of the tallest leaders of the BJP, is now a vocal critic of the policies of the Narendra Modi-led government. He quit the BJP in April 2018. The development assumes significance in poll-bound West Bengal.

"You will be surprised at today's development as to why at this age I am joining a party when I had withdrawn from party politics. This is because the country is passing through crucial times," Mr. Sinha said.

The 83-year-old politician said democracy does not only mean elections every five years.

"The strength of democracy lies in the strength of institutions and I say it with regret that these institutions, including the judiciary, in the country have been weakened," he said.

Yashwant Sinha joins
Trinamool Congress

"The BJP of Atalji (Atal Bihari Vajpayee) and the BJP now are poles apart. Atalji believed in consensus; today's government believes in crushing. Atalji used to co-opt people; today's government wants to conquer people," Mr. Sinha said.

Showering praise on Ms. Banerjee, Mr. Sinha said she is a fighter and expressed the hope that the Trinamool would return to power with a thumping majority. He recalled that during 1999 Kandahar hijack of Air India plane, when the Trinamool was a coalition partner of the Vajpayee government, Ms. Banerjee had volunteered at the Cabinet meeting to go and meet the hijackers to secure the release of hostages "as she is not afraid of her life".

"A message should go from Bengal that what Modi (Narendra Modi) and Shah (Amit Shah) are doing from Delhi cannot go on," he said, adding that a victory of Trinamool would strengthen call for *parivartan* (change)

in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Listing a series of failures of the BJP government at the Centre – including handling the farmers' protest, the condition of migrant workers during lockdown, the state of education and healthcare, Mr. Sinha said, "It seems like that the sole aim of the BJP is to win every election everywhere."

"The tipping point was the attack (in Nandigram) on Mamata Banerjee. When I spoke to her today, she described the incident to me... This government [at the Centre] can do anything to win the election. The attack on Mamataji made me decide that I want to work with her," he said about the March 10 incident.

The veteran politician had a maintained good rapport with the Trinamool leadership in the past and had also campaigned for the party in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll in West Bengal.

Mr. Sinha's son Jayant Sinha is the BJP MP from Hazaribagh in Jharkhand.