

# Ong Ye Kung quits to pursue 'other interests'

By **CHUANG PECK MING**

ONG Ye Kung, the People's Action Party (PAP) candidate touted to be of ministerial calibre in the last general election (GE), has quit the labour movement.

National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) secretary-general Lim Swee Say said in a statement yesterday that Mr Ong will be leaving the NTUC Administration and Research Unit (ARU) on Nov 25 to "pursue other career interests".

Mr Ong, who was in the PAP team defeated by the Workers' Party in the hotly contested Aljunied ward in the May 2011 General Election, is believed to be joining the private sector.

But the 43-year-old will continue as chairman of e2i, the NTUC-run Employment and Employability Institute, which trains and places low-wage and

low-skilled workers in suitable jobs.

In a post on Facebook, Mr Ong wrote: "Even as I leave the labour movement formally, I will continue to volunteer my services and work for the labour movement and the grassroots community. I look forward to embark on a new challenge and to step up to a new learning curve. Championing Singapore, and the interest of working people, will always be close to my heart."

"While Ye Kung will leave the employment of NTUC-ARU, he will still maintain strong links with NTUC, as he remains a strong advocate for the labour movement," Mr Lim said. He said under Mr Ong's leadership, e2i grew to become "a leading organisation in enhancing the employability of workers and matching better employ-



FILE PHOTO

**Mr Ong:** Believed to be joining the private sector, he will nevertheless continue as chairman of e2i

ment to job seekers".

"He has laid a solid foundation for e2i to grow into a national CET (Continuing Education and Training) campus when the Devan Nair Institute for Employment and Employability is ready by end-2013," Mr Lim said.

Mr Ong joined NTUC-ARC in December 2008 as assistant secretary-general. He was promoted to deputy secretary-general in June last year.

Besides being NTUC deputy secretary-general, Mr Ong was also executive secretary of the Singapore Industrial & Services Employ-

ees' Union, the Singapore Manual & Mercantile Workers' Union and the National Transport Workers' Union.

Although he lost in the 2011 GE, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said at a post-election press conference that he would bring Mr Ong into government "at some point".

Over the past year, there has been talk that Mr Ong wanted to quit NTUC and give up politics. In a media interview published three months ago, he said he was "certainly maintaining an active interest in politics", when asked if he would run in the next general election.

But he added: "Having said that, you can serve and make a difference without being in politics, and being in politics does not necessarily mean you are making a difference."

Mr Ong, a government scholar, was Mr Lee's principal private secretary from 2002 to 2004. In 2005, at age 35, he was appointed CEO of the Workforce Development Agency.

Political analyst Eugene Tan said it's premature to say that, with his resignation from NTUC, Mr Ong is quitting politics.

Dr Tan, who is an assistant professor of law at Singapore Management University and a Nominated Member of Parliament, reportedly told a reporter yesterday that "it does not signal that he's walking away from the political arena as it could widen his exposure".