

TOP UNION OFFICIAL

# Ong Ye Kung off to private sector?

*Former PAP candidate for Aljunied GRC in 2011 election said to be leaving NTUC*

SUMITA SREEDHARAN  
sumitas@mediacorp.com.sg

**SINGAPORE** – About 16 months after he had to deal with the disappointment of an electoral defeat, National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) Deputy Secretary-General Ong Ye Kung — who took part in last year's General Election as a People's Action Party (PAP) candidate and who has been touted to be of ministerial calibre — is leaving the labour movement for the private sector, TODAY understands.

It is understood that Mr Ong had informed the NTUC Central Committee at a meeting on Monday that he intends to resign from all his posts in the labour movement.

Apart from being the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr Ong, 43, is also the Executive Secretary of the Singapore Industrial & Services Employees' Union, the Singapore Manual & Mercantile Workers' Union and the National Transport Workers' Union.

Repeated attempts to contact Mr Ong were unsuccessful.

Unionists who were present at the meeting were tight-lipped but one of them, Mr Francis Lim, who is the President of United Workers of Electronic & Electrical Industries, reiterated that "we must respect any decision (Mr Ong) makes".

Mr Lim Kuang Beng, who is the committee's Secretary for Financial Affairs but did not say whether he attended the meeting, added: "I can't confirm till the official announcement."

According to sources, Mr Ong could be joining the private sector and an announcement will be made tomorrow.

In response to TODAY's queries, an NTUC spokesperson said it "has not received any resignation letter" from Mr Ong.

Mr Ong was part of the team — led by former Foreign Minister George Yeo — which lost Aljunied GRC to the Workers' Party in the GE last year.

In a press conference after the results were announced, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said he would bring Mr Ong into government "at some point".

Over the past year, there had been talk that Mr Ong wanted to leave the NTUC and give up politics. In a media interview published three months ago, Mr Ong was asked whether he would run in the next GE. He replied that he is "certainly maintaining an active



Mr Ong is said to have informed NTUC leaders of his plans. TODAY FILE PHOTO

Given that (Mr Ong) was groomed to be the successor at NTUC, it may suggest that he may be considering that the politics option may be something he's putting on the back burner.

**Mr Eugene Tan**  
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF LAW AT THE SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY

interest in politics".

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 had risen through the ranks of the public service. He was deputy chief negotiator of the United States-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Between 2002 and 2004, he also served as Principal Private Secretary to Mr Lee. In 2005, at the age of 35, Mr Ong was appointed Chief Executive of the Singapore Workforce Development Agency.

Mr Ong's move — if it materialises — could cast doubts on his political aspirations, given that the next elections — which must be held by 2016 — are less than five years away. But political analyst Eugene Tan said it is "premature to say" that Mr Ong has "given up on politics" should he join the private sector.

The Singapore Management University Assistant Professor of Law, who is also a Nominated Member of Parliament said: "It does not signal that he's walking away from the political arena as it could widen his exposure."

Still, he pointed out: "Given that he was groomed to be the successor at NTUC, it may suggest that he may be considering that the politics option may be something he's putting on the back burner."