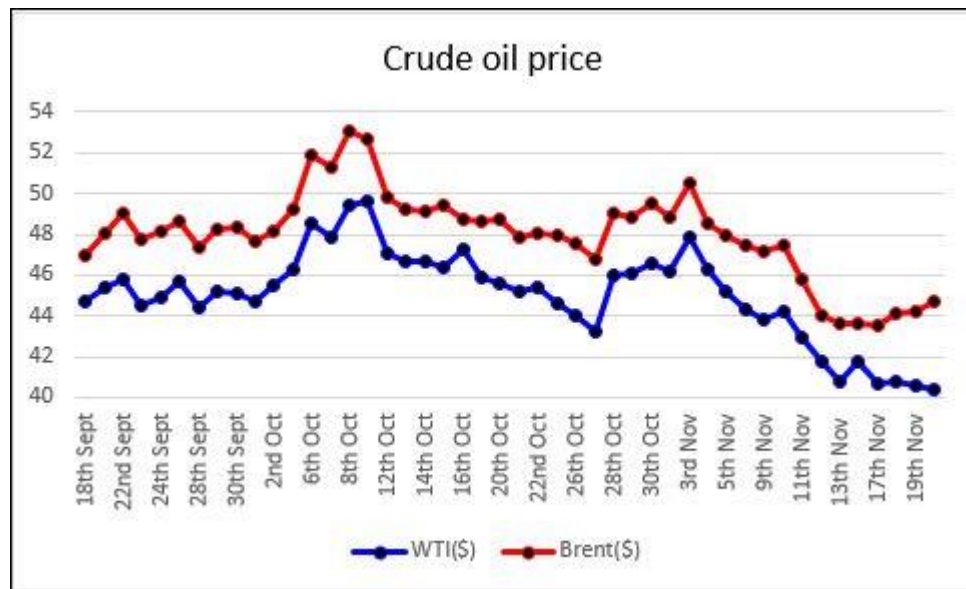


**Post 21<sup>st</sup> November, 2015**

Some of the news items for this week are as follows:



1. The crude oil prices remained close to the \$40 mark again due to the high levels of oil inventories stockpiled by different countries.
2. The Saudi Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi, speaking at a conference in Manama, Bahrain, said his country is working with OPEC members and non-OPEC producers to stabilize the market. This statement comes ahead of the OPEC meeting scheduled for Dec 4 to assess the market and make a decision on production levels.
3. The oil output from North Dakota's Bakken formation fell for the first time in more than a decade. The fall in output is due to the 'rig decline and low-price environment', and also because the companies are taking longer to complete the wells with hydraulic fracturing.
4. Earlier this week, TGS, the marine and land seismic data acquisition company, announced the layoff of 130 employees, or 16% of its workforce from its offices around the world. This has been done due to the 'weak market conditions, and keeping in mind the remarks made by large oil corporations concerning cuts in exploration and production budgets, not only for 2016 but also for 2017 and beyond'. Arcis Seismic Solutions, the company I work for, is part of TGS, and earlier this week we saw some employees let go. TGS CEO, Robert Hobbs, said the layoffs will 'improve organizational efficiency and competitiveness'.
5. Three more oilfield service companies announced laying off workers in Texas earlier this week. These companies are Trelleborg Offshore, National Oilwell Varco and Cameron International, and would be laying off 200, 120 and 75 jobs respectively.
6. Similarly, Enbridge Inc., Canada's largest pipeline company announced last Monday cutting 5% of its workforce. This represents 500 employees across Canada and the US, and 100 unfilled positions.

The present job situation is very bad with thousands of oil and gas industry workers out-of-job, and the discouraging part is that there is no respite in sight.

*For the lighter side this week:*

It is usually said that '*yawning is contagious*'. That is you tend to yawn when you see someone else yawn. Have you noticed it? And if so, the question that comes to mind is, why?

Scientists opine that just like contagious laughter and contagious crying, contagious yawning is a 'shared experience and promotes social bonding'. After an individual has been attending to some work in a focused way, yawning sets in when a sense of calm prevails. Also, one tends to yawn when one is bored or tired. A study carried out a few years ago found that children below 4 years of age are not susceptible to contagious yawning. As well, children with autism (mental condition from childhood due to disorders in brain development and characterized by difficulties in social interaction and non-verbal communication) are less likely to contagiously yawn.

Previous studies had also suggested a strong connection between yawning and empathy, intelligence time of day or the age of a person. More recent studies have not found such a connection. Rather it is said that sleepiness and temperature can trigger yawning. A thermal window around the average human body temperature can trigger yawning and as the temperature drops we yawn less. A common explanation given is that when we yawn we suck in oxygen-rich air which enters our bloodstream and helps us wake up or feel better. But scientists have not found any evidence of yawning bringing in changes in levels of oxygen in the bloodstream or blood pressure.

Another suggestion is that yawning has something to do with the brain. For example when it is time to go to bed, we tend to yawn more often. This observation has been explained by saying that our brain temperature becomes somewhat higher as we work; with yawning the inhaled air tends to lower the temperature of the blood vessels in our upper nasal cavities and which project the changes to our brain.

There may be several reasons behind contagious yawning and at present it is still a scientific mystery. More research is probably needed to explain contagious yawning. The topic may not be high on the priority list of scientists and so we may need to wait to find the right answers.

All said and done, after a yawn one feels good. So, why not do it.

*Scientists estimate that there are 100 billion galaxies in the universe?* Our solar system is a miniscule part of one galaxy. Did you know that? I didn't.

So much for this week!

Till the next post, stay safe and happy!