

"weird" in the real sense of the word. The vaccination issue is the latest that comes to mind.

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As the campaign takes place worldwide, predominantly in the West, voices urging caution are beginning to be heard even from professionals.

In Switzerland, the "emergency approval process" used by some countries to speed up the roll-out of Covid-19 vaccines is not a legal option, its medicines agency said recently. Interestingly, it is referred to as "premature vaccinations".

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is on record as saying that the vaccination exercise must not be made mandatory. "I don't think we envision any country creating a mandate for vaccination," a WHO spokesman was quoted as saying.

Presumably, there are information gaps as the search for a "silver bullet" is being rushed for more than just health reasons. Politics and economics are distinctively felt, so too is reputation to the extent of being dehumanised yet again.

The latter is blatant when the "uninformed" are vaccinated amid the many uncertainties, especially in communities in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Sometimes, they are made to be "grateful" for unjustly receiving "free" vaccines from donors far away while not knowing what it is ultimately all about.

In scientific terms, they could be viewed as guinea pigs to be experimented on without the benefit of getting full information of the risk. Indeed, it is an "inhumane world" in this regard.

The STAR conference could not stress this enough when it featured one of the world's foremost public intellectuals. He is none other than Professor Avram Noam Chomsky. The occasion was even more auspicious as it coincided with his 92nd birthday on Dec 7.

The linguist is known for his principled stance against injustice, discrimination and all that are deemed inhumane.

His work is not limited to language, but also covers politics, establishing him as a "pre-eminent public intellectual and one of the most original and wide-ranging political and social critics of our time".

Since the 1990s, Chomsky has been recognised as the leading dissident



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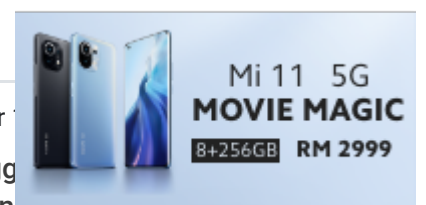
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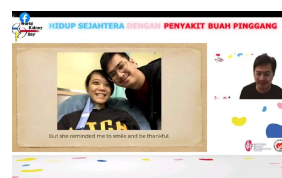
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voice worldwide. His scathing critique of current crises — ranging from media to aggression, especially involving the United States, has inspired many scholars and citizens globally.

He ignited the spirit of intellectual and academic freedom in the fight for social justice and human rights for almost half a century.

His book, *Manufacturing Consent*, comes to mind in trying to understand how the issues concerning vaccination are being handled, literally and figuratively.

The book argued that "the mass communication media of the US are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function, by reliance on market forces, internalised assumptions and self-censorship, and without overt coercion".

The model for the manufacture of public consent describes five editorially distorting filters, which are applied to the reporting of news in mass communications media.

In other words, WEIRD needs to quickly give way to a more wholesome, inclusive, sustainable and equitable (WISE) framework that will lead to a just and humane world as a higher purpose of life.

It calls for cohesive academic and intellectual solidarity that public intellectuals, like Chomsky, are tirelessly pushing for.

The writer, a 'New Straits Times' columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector



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