COLLEGE TRB PAPER 2

VICTORY COUNTDOWN SERIES

DAY 4

DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY

Artificial Intelligence can accelerate development, but also deepen socio-economic divides

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping the global economy by transforming industries, improving governance, and enhancing productivity. From healthcare diagnostics to precision agriculture, AI offers immense potential to accelerate development and solve long-standing challenges. However, the same technology can also widen socio-economic divides if access, skills, and benefits are unevenly distributed. AI, therefore, represents both an opportunity and a warning: its power can advance societies rapidly, but its misuse or unequal rollout can create new forms of inequality.

1. AI as a Driver of Development and Progress

a. Enhancing Efficiency and Productivity

AI automates repetitive tasks, improves decision-making, and reduces human error. Industries such as manufacturing, logistics, and finance now rely on AI to optimize processes, increase output, and minimize costs. This leads to higher growth and competitiveness.

b. Transforming Key Sectors

AI has revolutionized multiple development-critical sectors:

- **Healthcare** – AI enables early diagnosis, personalized treatment, and telehealth, improving access for remote areas.
- **Agriculture** – AI-powered forecasting, soil analysis, and pest detection help farmers increase yields and reduce losses.
- **Education** – Adaptive learning systems, virtual classrooms, and AI tutors support personalized learning at scale.
- **Governance** – AI enhances public service delivery, digital payments, welfare targeting, and disaster management.

Through these applications, AI strengthens national development, reduces inefficiencies, and bridges service gaps.

c. Boosting Innovation and Economic Growth

AI fuels entrepreneurship, new business models, and job creation in emerging fields such as robotics, fintech, cybersecurity, and data science. Countries that invest in AI gain strategic economic advantages and attract global investments.

2. How AI Can Deepen Socio-Economic Divides

a. Unequal Access to Technology

AI requires digital infrastructure, connectivity, and high-end devices. People in rural areas, low-income groups, and marginalized communities may not have equal access. This creates a **digital divide**, where the benefits of AI reach only a privileged section of society.

b. Skill Gaps and Job Displacement

AI automates many routine jobs, especially in manufacturing, retail, transport, and clerical work. Workers without digital or technical skills risk losing employment. Those with advanced education benefit, while low-skilled workers fall further behind, deepening income inequality.

c. Bias and Discrimination in AI Systems

AI learns from data. If the data reflects social biases—related to caste, gender, ethnicity, or class—the algorithm can reproduce and amplify these biases. This may affect hiring, credit scoring, policing, and access to services, worsening social discrimination.

d. Concentration of Power

AI development is dominated by a small number of corporations and technologically advanced countries. This leads to:

- monopoly over data
- control over digital markets
- unequal global influence

Such concentration can disadvantage smaller nations, local industries, and small businesses.

3. Balancing Development and Inclusion

a. Investing in Digital and AI Literacy

Training programs for students, workers, and rural communities are essential to ensure that AI benefits everyone. Skilling and reskilling will protect workers from job displacement and help them participate in the digital economy.

b. Ethical and Inclusive AI Policies

Governments must develop strong frameworks to prevent bias, ensure transparency, protect privacy, and regulate responsible AI use. AI must be designed to serve all sections of society, not only the technologically privileged.

c. Expanding Digital Infrastructure

Affordable internet, community digital centres, and rural technology initiatives can bridge access gaps and democratize the benefits of AI.

Artificial Intelligence has the potential to accelerate development, revolutionize public services, and create new opportunities for economic growth. However, if its benefits remain concentrated among the wealthy, the urban, and the technologically skilled, AI could deepen existing socio-economic divides. The challenge for policymakers is to make AI **inclusive**, **ethical**, and **accessible**. When combined with strong digital infrastructure, equitable skill development, and responsible governance, AI can become not a force of inequality, but a powerful tool for shared prosperity and human progress.