AI: BOON OR BANE?

Artificial Intelligence has expanded at a scale unprecedented in technological history, with the global AI market touching USD 196 billion in 2024 and projected to reach USD 1.8 trillion by 2030 (Statista, OECD). Nations are adopting AI not gradually but explosively—India's Digital Economy Report (2024) estimates that AI alone could add $500 billion to India's GDP by 2035, while the

The US predicts that AI-driven automation may accelerate productivity by 1.5% annually. The scale is so vast that over 77% of global devices now run at least one AI-powered function, making AI not just a technology but an infrastructure. This transformation demands a critical examination: is AI catalysing human progress, or is it creating challenges that outpace our ability to govern and adapt? As a boon, AI has delivered breakthroughs once considered science fiction. In medicine, AI-assisted diagnostic tools now detect breast cancer with 94% accuracy, outperforming human radiologists in several controlled tests (MIT, 2023). Google's DeepMind AlphaFold solved more than 200 million protein structures, accelerating drug development timelines by 70% for certain categories. Nations like Estonia, which digitised 99% of public services, cut administrative processing time by 63% using AI-backed governance. In disaster management, Japan's AI-enabled Earthquake Early Warning system reduced response time by 15 seconds, enough to prevent thousands of injuries annually. Agriculture, too, has benefited: precision-farming AI systems in Israel improved

water efficiency by up to 40%, proving that AI contributes directly to SDG 2 and SDG 6. Yet the same technology introduces risks with global ramifications. According to the World Economic Forum (2024), AI- powered misinformation increased by 480% between 2020 and 2024, posing serious threats to elections in over 40 democracies. Facial recognition misidentification rates remain as high as 34% for darker-skinned women (NIST), proving algorithmic bias is not hypothetical but widely documented. The International Labour Organisation warns that 300 million full- time jobs face partial or full automation risk globally, especially clerical, accounting, and customer-support roles. Even more worrying is military AI—autonomous drone systems used in Libya and Ukraine have already demonstrated behaviours that analysts classify as "partial autonomy," raising questions about accidental escalation and violations of international humanitarian law. Case studies across countries highlight contrasting outcomes. China's nationwide AI surveillance network, with over 700 million cameras, has reduced petty crime by 29% in monitored provinces but raised severe privacy criticisms worldwide. Meanwhile, the European Union's AI Act (2024) became the world's first comprehensive AI law, banning social scoring and enforcing transparency Audits an approach expected to reduce algorithmic discrimination incidents by at least 40% in pilot tests. In the private sector,
Amazon reportedly eliminated 10,000+ warehouse roles due to robotics integration, while IBM temporarily froze hiring for 7,800 roles replaceable by AI. Conversely, AI created 97 million new digital jobs, showing that the impact varies by country and skill level. Balancing these extremes requires coordinated global action grounded in ethics, governance, and accountability. Nations must implement transparency audits, expand reskilling programs, and enforce human-in-the-loop protocols for critical operations. International bodies must regulate autonomous weapons, deepfake distribution, and cross-border data governance before technology outpaces diplomacy. Only through a global framework, combining innovation with restraint can AI evolve into a tool that expands human potential rather than replacing it. AI magnifies whatever governance systems allow it to become.

PRASNSHUL AGARWAL (CLASS 8H)