



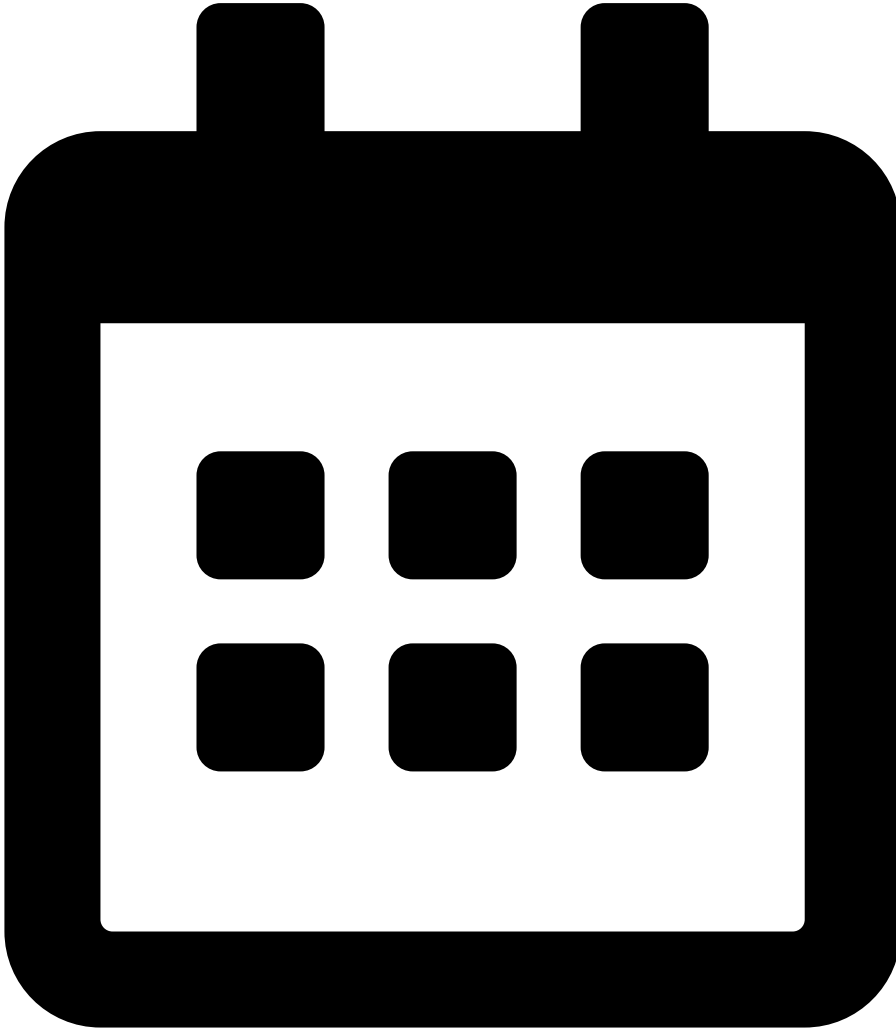
# **Mobility and Security in Mogadishu: Examining the New Bajaj Rotation System**



Ibrahim Jibril



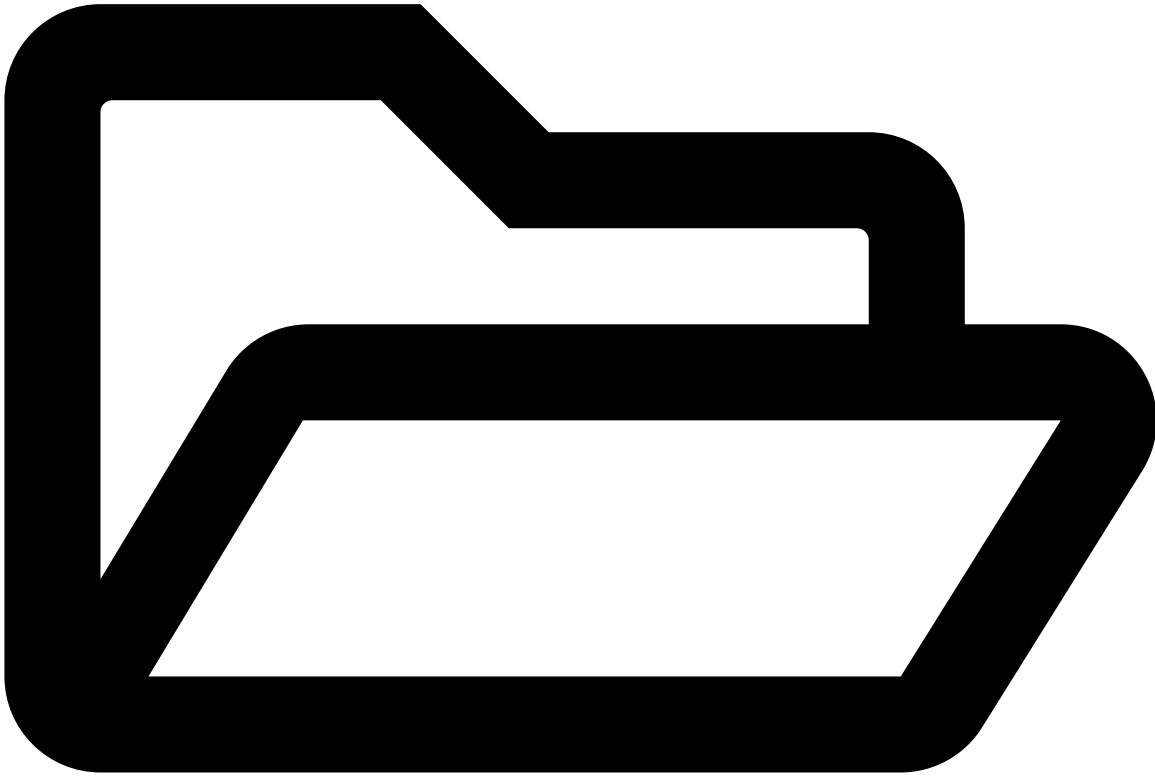
# Mobility and Security in Mogadishu: Examining the New Bajaj Rotation System



October 22, 2023



# Mobility and Security in Mogadishu: Examining the New Bajaj Rotation System



Commentary



At the end of March 2023, the Council of Ministers of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) issued [a series of directives](#), which included a directive on re-registration of all tuk-tuks (three-wheeled passenger motorcycles, also known as bajaj) and dividing them into two-color groups - yellow and blue - with the labels A and B respectively. The directive also suspended the importation of all motorcycles - including bajaj as well as two-wheeled motorbikes - from the ports throughout the country and particularly Mogadishu.

The Benadir Regional Administration (BRA) was tasked with the re-registration and labeling of the bajaj operating in Mogadishu. The BRA completed the registration and labeling of more than 33,000 bajajs in two months. The new regulation came into effect at the end of May 2023 and resulted in the reduction of the number of bajajs that operate on a single day on Mogadishu's roads. A and B-labelled bajajs started operating rotationally on the days of the week. The regulation also applies to bajajs that operate between Mogadishu and the neighboring districts in Hirshabelle and Southwest States - Balcad and Afgoye respectively. Any



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unregistered and unlabeled bajajs found operating in the streets would be subject to a fine of \$100. The same penalty applies to registered bajajs operating on unauthorized days. Additionally, in the case of unregistered self-labeled bajajs, these will be handed over to the security forces as they are considered a threat to the city's security.

These new regulations and the bajaj rotation system were adopted firstly to improve the traffic congestion throughout the city and secondly to improve security. Mobility within the city has been complicated in recent years due to the increase of bajajs, the continued presence of roadblocks on certain roads, and the inadequacy of transportation infrastructure. Though the bajaj has facilitated mobility, bajajs are also believed to have been used on several occasions to facilitate criminal activities such as murders, robbery, smuggling, and distribution of various types of weapons and drugs throughout the city. This commentary examines the new bajaj rotation system, its benefits, implications, and the way forward.

### **Bajaj Registration Benefits**

Aside from the implementation of the directive to label the bajaj and introduce the rotation system, the re-registration process has resulted in several other benefits. Firstly, the personal information of the bajaj owners/drivers, and the plate number of each bajaj have been registered. The Mogadishu Municipality now has a database containing all the registered bajajs using Mogadishu roads. Secondly, the re-registration process generated income for the BRA from the re-registration fees and has been linked with the BRA revenue generation system for tax compliance. During this process, some bajajs were found to be due 3 years' worth of tax money and were still operating in the city. Thirdly, the establishment of a database of all operating bajajs resulted in a new way of dealing with the change of bajaj ownership. If bajaj is to be sold, the owner and the potential buyer have to go to the Mogadishu Municipality to record this transaction in the database.

Although more than 33,000 bajajs were registered, this was actually less than the expected number. Many had estimated that the number of bajajs operating in Mogadishu was between **40,000 to 50,000**.

### **Implications of The Bajaj Rotation System**

Bajaj drivers (and owners) initially refused to implement the re-registration. This led to the extension of the registration deadline twice and later to the addition of



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another week for registration after the rotation system came into effect on May 25<sup>th</sup>. This itself occurred almost one month later than the planned date, which was at the end of April. However, this was not the first attempt to regulate bajaj in Mogadishu. In mid-June 2022, the Somali Police Force (SPF) launched the Samakaab Operation, which was supposedly designed to tackle youth gangs ([Ciyaal Weero](#)), robbers, and drug traffickers. During the second phase of the Samakaab operation in mid-July 2022, the SPF [banned bajaj](#) from operating in Mogadishu beyond midnight to improve the security of the city plagued by youth gangs (Ciyaal Weero) and the trafficking of drugs and weapons.

The difference between this and the later rotation directive was that the latter required several processes including re-registrations of all bajajs, verification of all the personal information of the owner, driver, and the bajaj plate number, checks that all due taxes are paid, and compliance with all legal requirements to drive and operate in the city. The 'Samakaab operation' curfew, on the other hand, was simply a blanket curfew enforced by the SPF.

More than four months since the bajaj rotation system was widely adopted on May 25 2023, and became fully functional throughout the city, the following are illustrations of the implications of the directive.

***Implications for City Traffic/Mobility:*** The bajaj rotation system has slightly improved city mobility and reduced the traffic jams due to the drastic reduction of the bajajs operating on particular days. The introduction of the new system solved one factor out of many that cause traffic congestion in the city. The other factors seem to still cause traffic jams that limit the positive outcome of the bajaj directive. Prominent among these are the continued intensive security checkpoints throughout the city.

Apart from this, the rotation system hasn't made significant improvements to the transportation system. In reality, the bajaj rotation system is imagined to be a simple remedy to complex urban mobility [challenges](#) that haven't yet been addressed. These include the weak and poorly maintained/upgraded transportation infrastructure (including a lack of sewage/drainage) systems, the unregulated boom of urbanization, an ever-increasing volume of private cars, and the limited capacity of public transport. Moreover, outdated traffic rules, inaccessibility of some closed roads due to the insecurity of the city, and key social services provided by both private and public institutions situated and centered in the [core and semi-peripheral districts](#) of the city also complicate mobility in Mogadishu.



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The slight improvement in city mobility could be further limited by the anticipated increase in the number of operating bajajs in the city despite the suspension of imports. One reason for this is the fact that there were many bajajs stored in garages and warehouses before this ban came into effect. All of these bajajs will go through the re-registration process and start operating in the city. The other reason is that bajajs, unlike cars, are imported in disassembled form. Bajajs are not assembled at the port and are not given plate numbers there. Therefore, the challenge lies in preventing the import of disassembled bajaj while at the same time allowing necessary bajaj spare parts to arrive. This is a loophole companies could use (and are already using) to continue importing the 3-wheeled motorcycle.

***Implications for Security:*** The adoption of the bajaj rotation system coincided with the new deployment of Ugandan-trained Somali military police forces throughout the city. The two initiatives both aim to improve the security and stability of the city. The bajaj rotation system has contributed to improving the city's security and stability. It allows the government to know the identity of every bajaj owner and driver, which facilitates easier identification and tracing of perpetrators of insecurity incidents where bajajs are involved.

It is believed that some bajajs weren't previously registered or had been stolen from their real owner. These had been then used to attack and rob people, distribute weapons, or in other illegal activities. With the re-registration process, they could be impounded and the individuals involved could be arrested. Thus, the rotation system was key in removing unregistered bajajs from the roads and this contributes to the improvement of the security. This is one dimension that partly explains why the actual number of registered bajajs was lower than the estimated number of bajajs in the city.

When the rotation system was operationalized, the reduction in the number of bajajs operating in the city each day made the security checks throughout the city more feasible. This allowed the military police to inspect vehicles and bajajs more by intensively checking the vehicles, drivers, and passengers simultaneously. This, however, resulted in long queues of vehicles and bajajs at these checkpoints. While this is seen as good for improving security and stability, it has also resulted in traffic jams, which was the very problem the bajaj rotation system was trying to solve in the first place. Bajaj drivers often complain about this issue, which usually occurs at checkpoints near junctions. They work one day every two days and want to make up for the other day's lost income. Finding as many passengers in the day to make up for this lost income is hindered by the time lost in these long inspection lines.



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***Implications for Bajaj Owners, Drivers, and the Public:*** The bajaj rotation system has had the biggest impact on the bajaj owners and drivers themselves, and the public, albeit to a lesser extent. The system had both positive and negative impacts on different segments of Mogadishu's population, although the system is still in its early stages.

Besides the slight improvement in the city's mobility and security, the bajaj rotation system changed the nature of work and allowed bajaj drivers to have a day off every two days. This means they now get 15 rest days each month. It allowed the drivers to spend time with their families, which wasn't possible before this system. The bajaj drivers used to work on average six days a week, and it was hard to get time for their families except for a small portion who maintained a work-life balance.

Moreover, the adjustment in working days reduced the need for them to use stimulant drugs – particularly khat, SNUS/"Tabuu" and Tramadol (a strong pain medication) – to work longer hours on consecutive days, as was allegedly the case before the introduction of the new system. The majority of bajaj drivers are young men who purchased the bajaj on loans. Therefore, to meet the monthly required installment to their lender while paying their bills, they used to work extended hours for consecutive days with little or no sleep. To work overtime, some of them used to use drugs that made them active for long hours. The rotation system prevented consecutive working days. Thus, there is less need to use drugs like khat to operate (unless they are already addicted).

Furthermore, the longevity and durability of the bajaj are better preserved through this rotation system. The new system mandates each bajaj to work a day every two days. While utilizing these rest days, some bajaj drivers opted to rent bajajs from others and work consecutive days while others tried other things, and the majority rested.

Furthermore, The drivers' *daily* income from the bajaj has reportedly also increased. As per the author's interaction and discussion with bajaj drivers, the average income on a good day was previously between \$20 to \$35, and this has increased now to around \$30 – \$45 with some occasionally getting up to \$50. While this increase is significant, it doesn't make up for the potential missed income from the now mandatory rest days. The daily increase comes from the reduction of the bajajs using the roads on a single day, giving those operating the chance to get more passengers as the competition is decreased. Also, the working hours on a single day



have increased, as drivers try to compensate for lost earnings on the following rest day.

Some bajaj owners don't drive themselves. Instead, they rent the vehicle out to other drivers with a daily payment required from the renters; this fee was about \$8 to \$10 per day. With the new rotation system, the fee increased to \$15 per day. Despite this, there hasn't been an increase in the bajaj fare. Although bajaj drivers tried to increase the fare rate at first, it wasn't sustained as the people's income situation remained the same. However, bajaj drivers deal with the fare differently, charging as much as possible depending on the expected wealth of the passenger.

The bajaj rotation system didn't impact the general public to such a great extent as the bajaj owners and drivers. Two groups of people who have been affected are the students and some 9 - 5 workers, particularly women due to security concerns. Because of the insecurity of the city at night, women prefer to ride bajajs whose drivers they know personally, as they avoid the risk of being robbed, raped, or otherwise harmed at night. Furthermore, there are bajaj users who have a routine of where to board and take the vehicles. They used to rent bajajs and pay them monthly for a fixed fee slightly lower than if they were to ride a different bajaj each day. With the rotation system, this could not work as bajajs can't operate every day. With this being the case, bajaj drivers also lost a guaranteed monthly income and regular clients. To make up for that, some partnered with other bajaj drivers riding the opposite number (A vs. B) on operating days to serve their clients while they drove theirs on the other day, thus keeping both of their clients and helping each other.

### **The Way Forward**

The implementation of the bajaj rotation system in Mogadishu has brought about change to the city's transportation landscape and security dynamics. While the system has shown both positive and negative impacts on various aspects of society, its effects have yet to be fully realized. Looking ahead, several important considerations and potential areas for improvement are identified below:

1. **Traffic Infrastructure Planning:** The bajaj rotation system has highlighted the need for comprehensive traffic infrastructure planning and urban development. The reduction in traffic congestion achieved through the system's implementation underscores the importance of addressing not only the number of vehicles on the road but also the quality and capacity of roads,



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as well as efficient traffic management mechanisms.

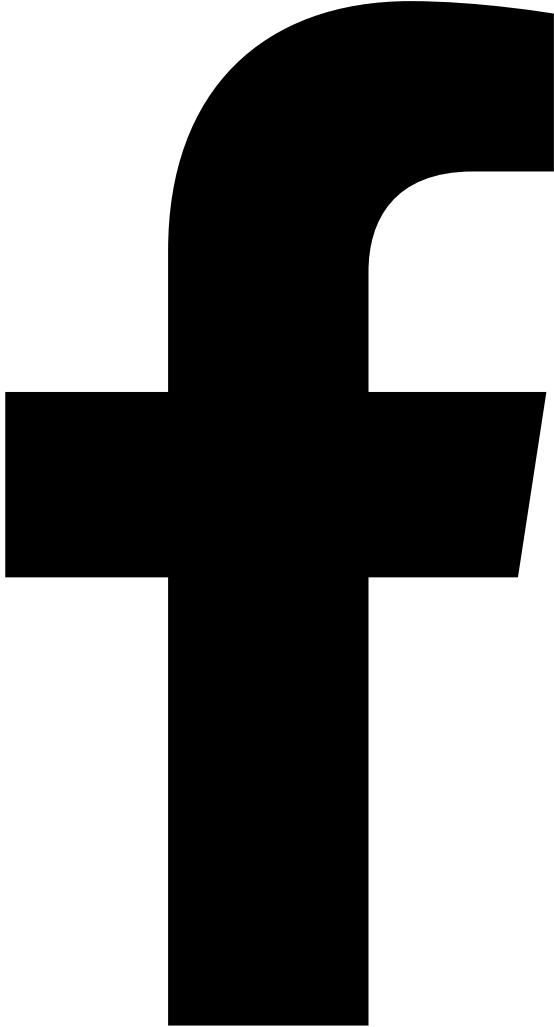
2. **Security and Law Enforcement:** While the rotation system has aided security measures by reducing the number of vehicles on the road at any given time, there is a need for a measured approach. Striking a balance between security checkpoints and efficient traffic flow is crucial. Law enforcement agencies should adapt their tactics to minimize the negative impact on traffic while maintaining robust security measures.
4. **Public Transport Alternatives:** The rotation system has led to challenges for individuals who rely on bajajs for daily commutes, such as students and regular workers. To address this, there is a need to explore a wider range of alternative transportation options. Improving the capacity, reliability, and affordability of bus services should be a priority. More research is needed into the impacts of ride-sharing platforms and taxis on city congestion to reduce traffic jams. In the longer term, some provisions for cyclists should be considered. This could be composed of cycling lanes, routes, and parking and could be a solution for reducing the number of cars and limiting air pollution. Such basic infrastructure has been part of road development in cities like Nairobi, albeit with modest success.
5. **Long-Term Urban Planning:** To address the root causes of traffic congestion, a long-term urban planning strategy is essential instead of regulations that have few sustainable benefits in sight and serve as a stop-gap remedy for a wide range of challenges. Incorporating sustainable transportation solutions, road expansion, public transport enhancement, and integration of modern traffic management systems will help create a more effective and resilient transportation infrastructure. There is a need for a policy that regulates the unorganized city expansion in infrastructure, which worsens the situation and will pose additional problems not only in transportation but also in the overall appearance of the city in the future.

[Ibrahim Jibril](#) is a research assistant at Somali Public Agenda.

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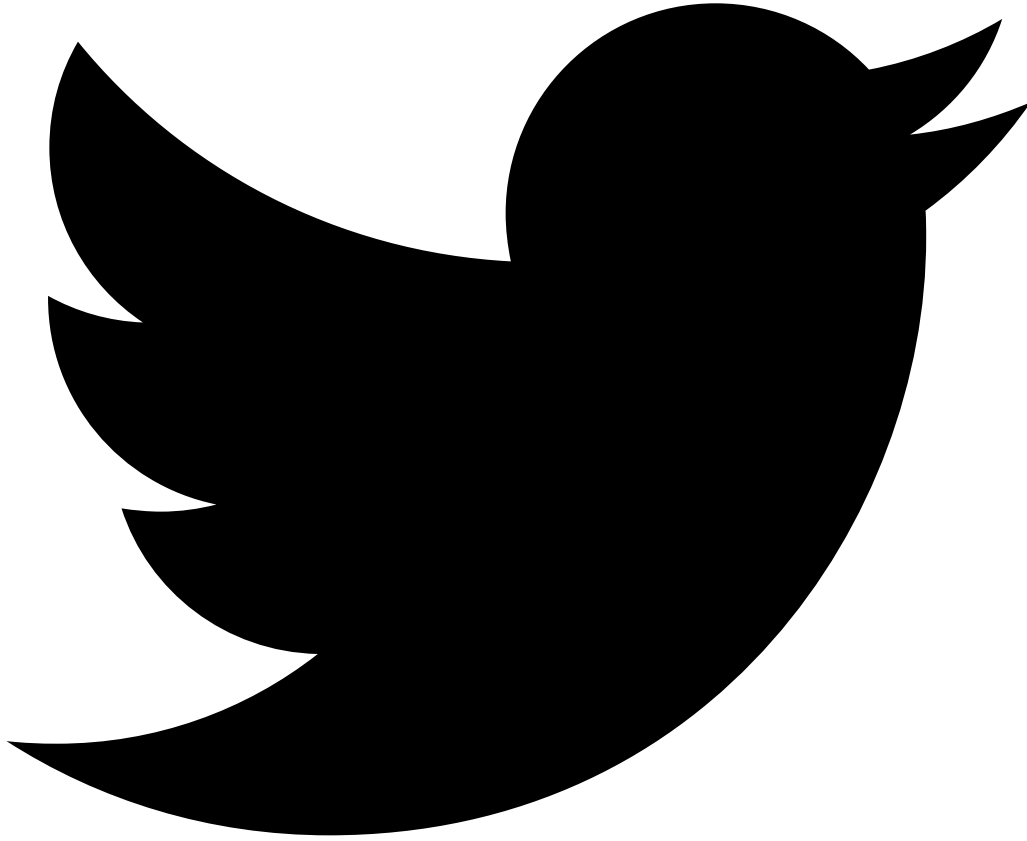
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## 4 Responses

1.  **Maryan** says:  
[November 9, 2023 at 5:17 pm](#)

What a brilliant, original and important study – using the bajaj example to highlight the lack of urban planning and traffic regulation.

[Reply](#)

1.  **Somali Public Agenda** says:



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[November 11, 2023 at 9:35 am](#)

Thank you Mary for the feedback.

[Reply](#)



2. **Abdikader Mohamed Rasas** says:

[December 27, 2023 at 4:34 pm](#)

Upon a glance, I came across a valuable article that offers meaningful recommendations for both scenarios. It gave me a clear picture of the best practices for growing cities like Jijiga, the capital of the Somali regional state. The article discussed the implementation of a rotation system for Bajaj, and how it can be helpful in such cities.

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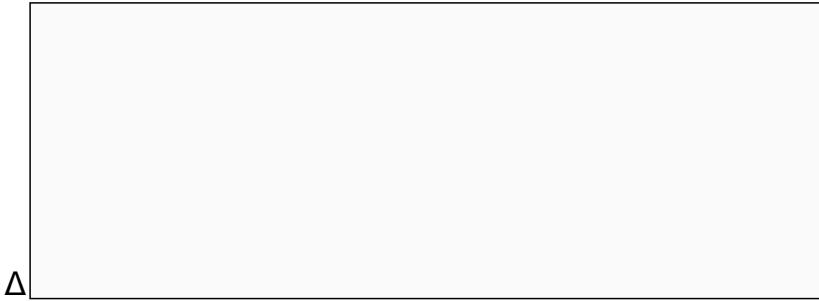
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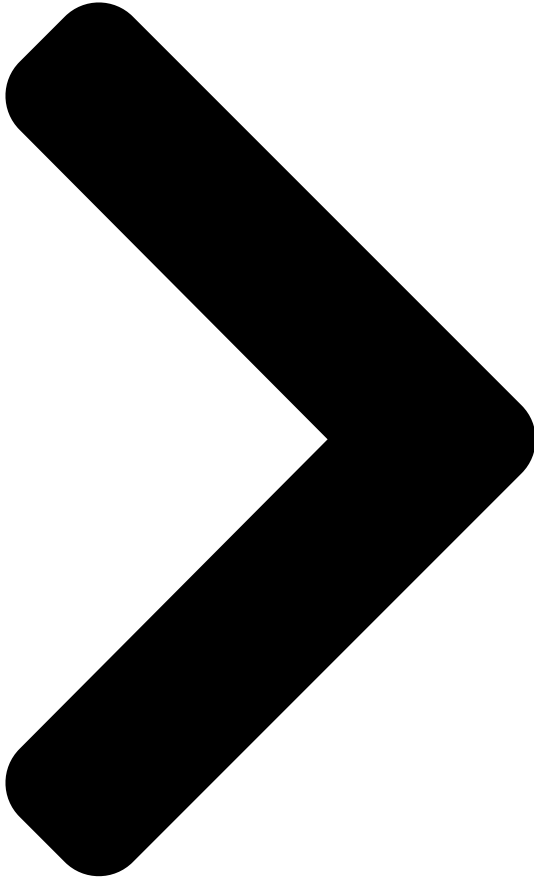
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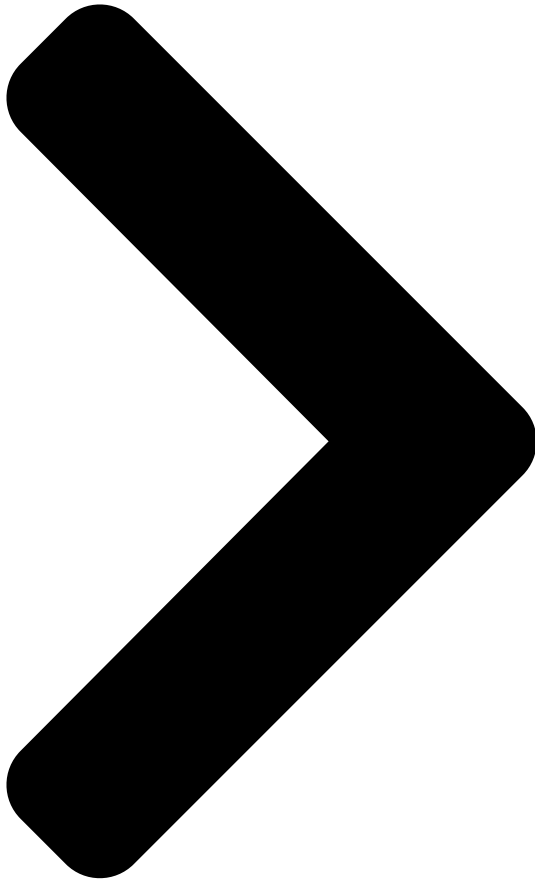


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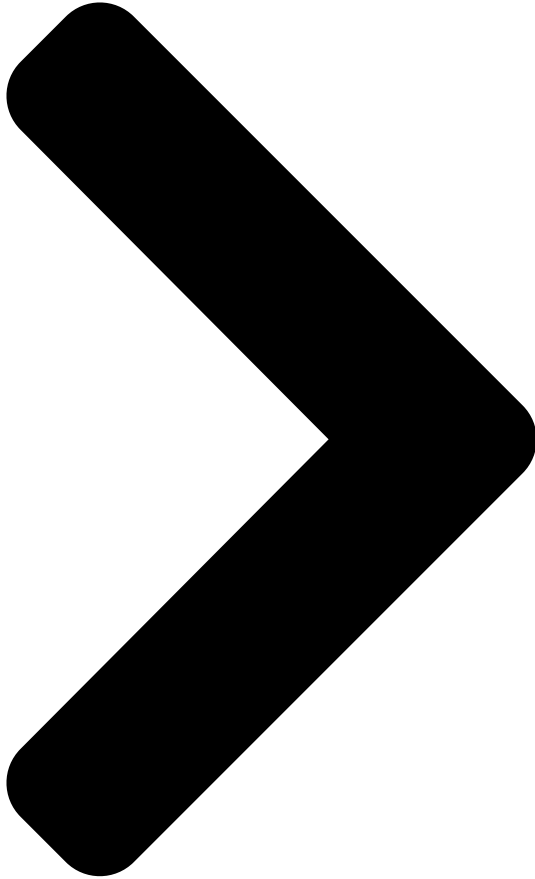


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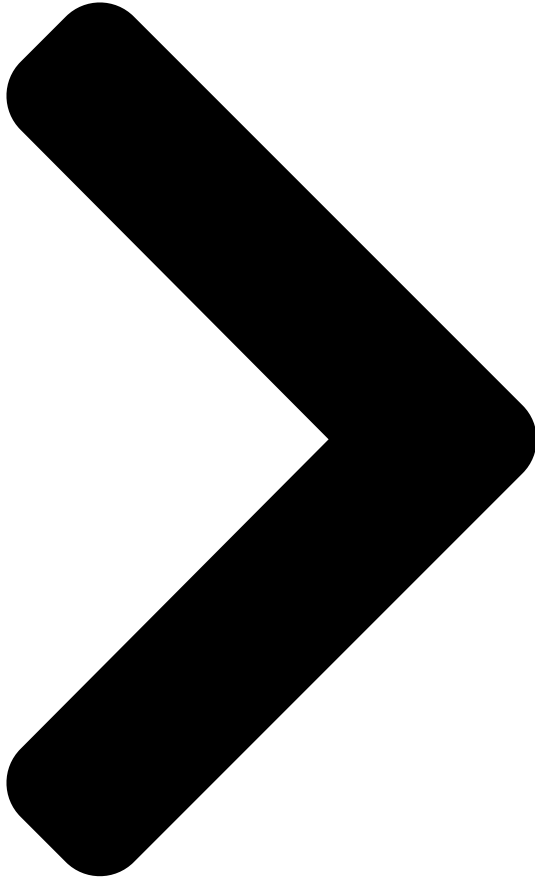


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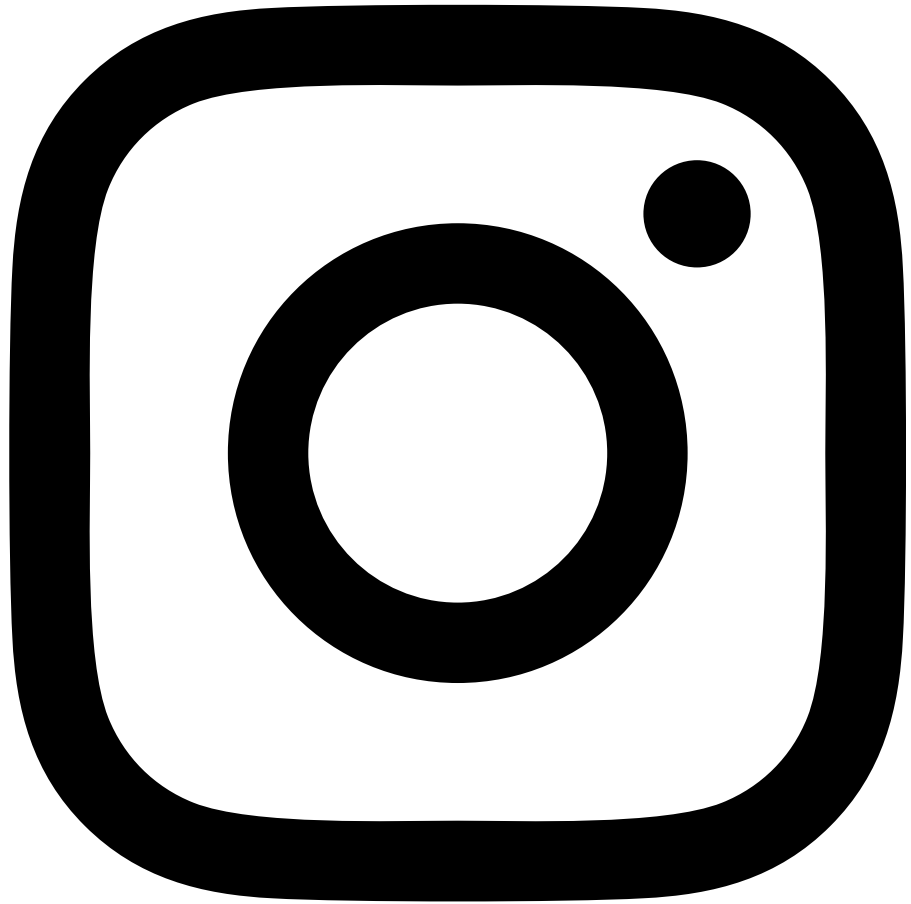
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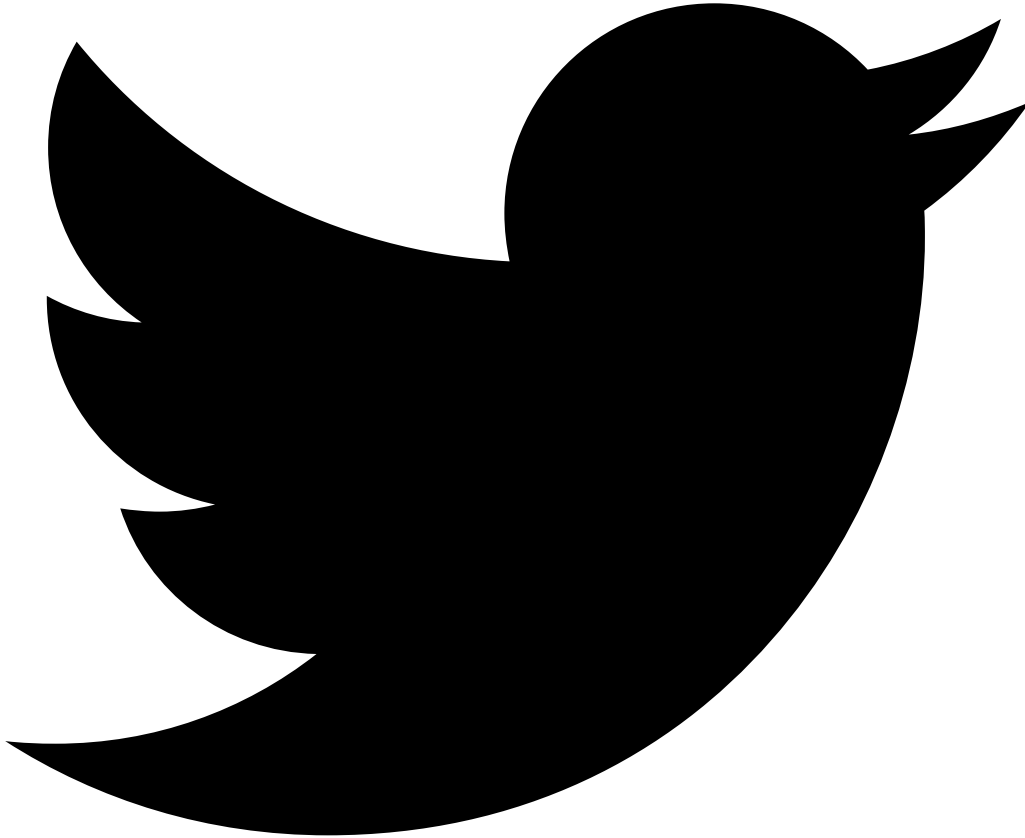
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