

Coupang Play on track for four 2H releases

Korean streamer says sports focus has not derailed entertainment

Coupang Play will release four more originals by end 2024, bringing this year's total to seven and dismissing gossip that sports has overtaken drama on the Korean streamer's priority list.

The full story is on page 5



Off the Hooq Singtel closes the book

Singapore telco, Singtel, has snuffed out the last signs of life of doomed streaming platform Hooq – more than four years after the service collapsed leaving a trail of wailing producers and programmers in its wake.

The full story is on page 3



Heeramandi returns to Netflix Demand high for Indian epic

A month after its release, Netflix's *Heeramandi* has been renewed for a second season. Today's announcement comes as measurement platforms track outside demand for the Indian epic.

The full story is on page 11

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Off the Hooq

Singapore's Singtel announces the final chapter of doomed streamer

Singapore telco, Singtel, has hammered the final nail into the coffin of doomed streaming platform Hooq – more than four years after the service collapsed leaving a trail of wailing producers and programmers in its wake.

Singtel said today (3 June) that the creditors voluntary liquidation process had been completed.

In a short announcement, Singtel said that Hooq Digital was “dissolved” on 31 May 2024.

Singtel pulled the plug on Hooq in March 2020, shocking an industry that had been hoping for the best.

Hooq Mauritius followed the Hooq mothership into liquidation in May 2020, owing undisclosed millions to producers and rights holders.

Hooq Mauritius held the bulk of the content/IP contracts signed for the failed Asian streaming platform.

About 250 people lost their jobs in the collapse.

According to filings with Singapore’s Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA), the five-year-old joint venture went under with total current liabilities of USD70.8 million and an accumulated loss of US\$221 million as of 31 March 2020.

The two joint venture partners were Sony Pictures Television and Warner Bros, which held equal shares. Both stakes had been diluted, and neither was represented on the board at the time of liquidation.

Content from both remained on the service until the end, and both were believed to be among Hooq’s approx 40 creditors.

Terms of the final settlements have not been disclosed.

HAF deadline: 17 June

Submissions for this year’s Hong Kong – Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF) Film Lab close on 17 June.

Mentors for the 7th edition include Chan Hing-kai, Felix Tsang, Kong Jinlei, Liu Qing, Matthias Delvaux, Tomy Wai and Yang Chao.

The Film Lab is open to Chinese feature film projects of 60 minutes or longer from a director who has directed no more than two feature films.

Three Script Services Awards will be given out, and the winners will be granted automatic entry to the HKIFF Industry Project Market in March 2025.

The 7th Film Lab will take place from 26-30 August 2024. Around 10 Chinese-language projects will be selected.



Charo Santos joins ABS-CBN board

ABS-CBN Corporation has appointed former ABS-CBN president and CEO, Charo Santos-Concio, to its board of directors. She replaces Augusto Almeda-Lopez, who died earlier this year.

The appointment tops decades of involvement with ABS-CBN, initially as one of the country's most powerful broadcasters and then, when its franchise was not renewed, in its new incarnation as a content company.

In addition to her long career as an actress and entertainment personality, Santos-Concio held a number of senior roles at ABS-CBN, including chief content officer and head of Channel 2 Mega Manila management.

She was also the host of the Philippines longest-running TV drama anthology programme, *Maalaala Mo Kaya*.

In 2014, she was named ContentAsia's Asia Media Woman of the Year.

Japanese romance heads to Netflix

Romantics Anonymous adaptation set for 2025

Netflix has added a Japanese romantic drama series to its 2025 slate, flagging a global ensemble cast and creative talent for a still-unnamed show based on the French film, *Les Émotifs anonymes* (*Romantics Anonymous*).

The series, currently in production, stars Shun Oguri, Han Hyo-Joo, Yuri Nakamura and Jin Akanishi.

Les Émotifs anonymes, which won the Audience Award at the French Film Festival in Japan in 2011, kicks off with a chance encounter between a man and a woman sparked by their mutual love for chocolate. The catch is their anxiety disorders; he can't physically touch others and she can't make eye contact.

Japan's Shun Oguri plays Sosuke Fujiwara, the new representative of a popular chocolate shop, opposite Korea's Han Hyo-Joo as a gifted chocolatier.

Yuri Nakamura joins the project as Irene, a renowned psychologist and author who is Sosuke's primary physician and Hana's counsellor, but who faces her own struggles with alcoholism and romantic relationships. Jin Akanishi plays bar owner Hiro Takada, Hana's love interest and Sosuke's old friend.

Sho Tsukikawa (*Yu Yu Hakusho*) directs the series. Lee Ha Jun (*Parasite*) leads production design, with Yang Jin Mo (*Parasite*) as editor, and veteran music director, Dalpalaan, on music.

This is the first Japanese series developed and produced by Yong Film (*My Name is Loh Kiwan*).

- Netflix will premiere Thai drama *Master of the House* on 18 July. A partnership with Kantana Motion Pictures, the series was one of 18 originals announced in February this year.

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Coupang Play on track for four second-half 2024 releases

Korean streamer says strong focus on sports has not derailed entertainment ambitions

Korean domestic streamer Coupang Play is gearing up for the release of four new originals in the second half of this year, bringing this year's total to seven, and is dismissing industry gossip that its new-found obsession with sports has overtaken drama on its priority list.

The seven titles include exclusive Korean rights for *The Sympathizer*, based on Viet Thanh Nguyen's award-winning novel about the struggle of a mixed-race Vietnamese youth in exile in the U.S. in the 1970s after the fall of Vietnam. The series aired on Max platforms elsewhere in the world.

The first of the four new major shows coming up is Coupang's first romcom, ***Cinderella at 2am***, directed by Seo Min-jeong and Bae Hee-young. Production is by Imagineers and Studio Real.

Coupang promises a "cliché-busting romantic comedy" with *Cinderella at 2am*, a story of love across the age gap.

Shin Hyun-bin stars as the "Cinderella" character who breaks up with her much younger prince, played by Moon Sang-min, when she discovers he is the third-generation son of a powerful chaebol and is paid by his mother to disappear. He, however, is not so easily put off.

Cinderella at 2am will be followed by ***What Comes After Love***, starring Se-young Lee (*Red Sleeves*) and Kentaro Sakaguchi (*10 Years of Remaining Life*) in the story of students who meet in Japan, fall in love and separate painfully only to reunite in Korea five years later.

The third series is ***Elite League***, which returns for a second season, followed by ***Family Matters***.

Exact release dates have not yet been confirmed.

Reality/survival entertainment show, *Elite League*, pits students from prestigious universities against one another. Coupang promises an "even more



Cinderella at 2am

intense and overwhelming cerebral battle" for the second season.

The platform launched its call for entries for the second season on 22 May. The second season is open to all students enrolled at Seoul National University, Korea University, Yonsei University, KAIST, and Pohang University of Science and Technology. The deadline for entries is 5 July.

In the new season, writer Kim Jeong-seon, known as a master of survival entertainment shows such as *The Genius* and *The Great Escape*, teams up with Heo Beom-hoon D of *Gukdae is Gookdae*.

Family Matters, directed by Heo Beom-hoon and Kim In-ji, is about a mother with special abilities, played by Bae Doo-na, who joins forces with her family to bring hell to villains.

The four follow ***Hide***, a Coupang Play and JTBC/SLL joint-project, released on

23 March; *The Sympathizer*, released on 15 April; and comedy show ***SNL Korea*** season five, produced by CP Entertainment.

The titles were showcased in Coupang Play's slate announcement in April this year.

Based on Welsh TV series *Keeping Faith*, *Hide* stars Lee Bo-young (Agency) as a former prosecutor who runs a law firm with her husband, played by Lee Moo-saeng (*Prison Playbook*). When he disappears, she begins searching for him, only to uncover the secrets of his disappearance.

The series combine with Coupang biggest-ever sports commitment, including baseball, Formula One, golf, basketball and the German Bundesliga.

Coupang Play, which launched in the second half of 2020, has more than eight million monthly active users.

Netflix returns Sanjay Leela Bhansali epic, *Heeramandi* Mixed verdicts from India's critics on season one of Netflix's biggest India original

Netflix is returning Sanjay Leela Bhansali's epic, *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar*, for a second season, the streamer said in Mumbai this afternoon.

Netflix said ahead of the premiere of the eight-episode season one from Bhansali Productions that the show was its biggest Indian original to date.

The streamer has not confirmed the budget. According to national daily, *The Times of India*, *Heeramandi*'s budget was Rs200 crore/US\$24 million, with Bhansali's directing fee estimated at between Rs 60 crore/US\$7.2 million and Rs70 crore/US\$8.4 million.

Season two production/release details have not been confirmed, and no storyline or cast hints were included in today's announcement.

Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar season one is set in pre-independence India against a burgeoning freedom movement, where the final thread holding the art of courtesans is put to the test.

Season one stars Manisha Koirala as Mallikajaan, who rules over an elite house of courtesans, fearing no one... until the return of Fareedan (played by Sonakshi Sinha) heralds an epic battle for the position as head of *Heeramandi*.

The epic series was released on 1 May, and swiftly became the platform's most-watched series in India and nine other countries, primarily in South Asia.

The series topped Netflix's India TV rankings for the four weeks to 26 May, with positions on the non-English TV top 10 in 43 countries for its first week on air.

Heeramandi reached #2 on the global non-English top 10 for the weeks to 5 May (4.5 million views / 33 million hours viewed) and 12 May (4 million views / 29.3 million hours viewed), falling to #5 in its third week on the platform (2.4 million views / 17.3 hours viewed) and #7 in the latest week (1.5 million views / 11.3 million hours viewed).



Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar

For the week to 26 May, *Heeramandi* was on the top 10 in 14 countries, and #1 in three – India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. This was down from 17 countries the previous week.

Critics' opinions ranged wide, from rave to rotten.

Rotten Tomatoes' critics consensus was: "Ostensibly a feminist epic, *Heeramandi*'s lavish production design and sprawling cast are hampered by rote pacing and a grim treatment of its characters."

Giving the series 2.5 out of 5 stars, *The Indian Express*' Shubhra Gupta said "Bhansali and his brand of youthful heartbreak has always been a strong point of his narratives, but here, it's when the older women are in full flow, opening up their hard-won chest of wiles and wanton-ness, that it earns its histrionics, and makes you stay".

Fellow reviewer, Rohan Naahar, also in *The Indian Express*, didn't agree, calling the series "exploitation cinema" and describing the show as "humourless and ultimately hollow". He also said it offered

"plenty of palace intrigue, historical drama, and unchecked opulence, all filtered through Bhansali's signature brand of elevated B-grade storytelling".

The Federal's Poulomi Das didn't hold back either, labelling Bhansali as a "filmmaker far more comfortable in depicting the illusion of women's strength rather than a display of it".

The Times of India's Dhaval Roy was more generous with his 3.5 ratings, saying the series "dazzled with stellar performances and visual grandeur... In his OTT debut, which is nothing short of grand, Sanjay Leela Bhansali skilfully immerses viewers in a saga of love, rivalry, betrayal, power play, and revolution".

The Financial Express called the series a "glittering gem in Indian cinema's crown". Reviewer Eshita Bhargava said "*Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar* stands as a testament to Sanjay Leela Bhansali's prowess as a storyteller, offering viewers a rich tapestry of human experiences against the backdrop of a bygone era".

“Factor in contingencies,” says producer Vincent Wang *Viet and Nam, Black Tea* co-pro experiences shared at Focus Asia/FEFF

French/Taiwanese producer Vincent Wang sounded a cautious note during this year's Far East Film Festival (FEFF). Factor in contingencies, Wang advised festival attendees in the northern Italian town of Udine.

Speaking about his experience on *Black Tea*, Wang outlined a scenario that ballooned the projected EUR 5 million budget, set in 2019, to EUR 7.2 million by 2023.

The reasons? Many, Wang said.

For one, grant stipulations required cameras to be shipped from Luxembourg to Taiwan and then to the Ivory Coast. “That was a nightmare,” Wang said.

In addition, the month-long shoot in Taiwan was switched from mostly day to night scenes a week before shooting as director Abderrahmane Sissako wanted a moodier atmosphere for the story about an African woman and a Chinese tea master. The art department also constructed sets, such as a market, which were not in the original budget.

The *Black Tea* team persisted – and the film premiered at this year's Berlinale.

Black Tea, which tapped regional funding from government agencies such as Taiwan's Taicca, involved studios from France (Archipel 35, Cinefrance Studios and Wang's House on Fire), Luxembourg (Red Lion), Mauritania (Dune Vision) and the Ivory Coast (Wassakara Productions).

The second co-production highlighted during the ninth edition of Focus Asia – FEFF's industry programme designed for filmmakers, distributors and sales agents – was Trương Minh Quý-directed *Viet and Nam*, a dreamlike exploration of the relationship between two coal miners who live by the sea.

Backed by eight production houses, *Viet and Nam* was included in this year's Un Certain Regard lineup at the Cannes Film Festival.



Picture credit: @Nicolas Graux

Viet And Nam

Backing was led by the Philippines (Epicmedia), and included Singapore (E&W Films), France (Deuxième Ligne Films), the Netherlands (An Original Picture), Italy (Volos Films), Germany (Scarlet Visions), the U.S. (Cinema Inutile) and Vietnam (Lagi Limited).

Viet and Nam raised almost EUR 940,000/US\$1 million. The bulk of the funding came from France, Singapore, and the Philippines.

The producers noted that the presence of European collaborators piqued the attention of Asia backers, but almost 90% of the money raised came from state arts funds or project markets, including Rotterdam's Hubert Bals Fund and Manila's Film Development Council of the Philippines.

The film endured cultural differences between what producers described as the easygoing nature of Asians and the need for consistency from Europeans.

“The clash between the fluidity and rigidity wasn't negative or positive, but it

was the biggest complication we felt,” said Epicmedia's Bradley Liew, speaking via Zoom as he prepped his film for Cannes. Epicmedia's Bianca Balbuena, Volos Films' Stefano Centini and Scarlet Visions' Christian Jikil joined in person.

The 11 projects selected from 100 submissions from 25 countries for FEFF/ Focus Asia's All Genres Project Market 2024 ranged from drama, coming of age and art-house to surreal, fantasy and thriller from Vietnam, Thailand, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The All Genres section is for projects with an Asian and European co-production potential.

The six films in the Far East in Progress section, dedicated to Asian films in post-production seeking international distribution and festival premieres, included *Sunshine*, directed by Antoinette Jadaone and produced by Geo Lomuntad, Project 8 Projects (Philippines).
 – by Alyssandra Maxine



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Contact

Leah Gordon

Leah@contentasia.tv (Americas/Europe)

Malena Amzah

Malena@contentasia.tv (Asia Pacific/
Middle East)

CJ Yong

CJ@contentasia.tv (China/Taiwan)



What's on where...

June 2024	6-8	Telefilm Vietnam 2024	Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
	17-18	DW Global Media Forum 2024	Bonn, Germany
	24-27	Sunny Side of the Doc 2024	France
	24-28	29th Shanghai TV Festival 2024	Shanghai, China
July 2024	3-5	15th Content Tokyo 2024	Tokyo, Japan
August 2024	20-24	Beijing International Radio, TV & Film Exhibition 2024	Beijing, China
	27	AVIA: Korea in View 2024	Seoul, Korea
	29	AVIA: Japan in View 2024	Tokyo, Japan
September 2024	3-5	ContentAsia Summit 2024	Taipei, Taiwan
	5	ContentAsia Awards 2024	Taipei, Taiwan
	24-26	APOS 2024	Bali, Indonesia
	26-29	Gwangju Ace Fair 2024	Gwangju, Korea
October 2024	5-8	Asian Contents & Film Market 2024	Busan, Korea
	10	AVIA: Vietnam in View 2024	Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam
	18-20	MipJunior 2024	Cannes, France
	21-24	Mipcom 2024	Cannes, France
	30 Oct-1 Nov	TIFFCOM 2024	Tokyo, Japan
November 2024	12-13	Dubai International Content Market (DICM)	Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai
	20-22	16th Content Tokyo 2024	Chiba, Japan
December 2024	3	AVIA: OTT Summit 2024	Singapore
	3	The ATF Leaders Dialogue 2024	Singapore
	4-6	Asia TV Forum & Market /ATF 2024	Singapore
February 2025	23-27	Mip London 2025	London, U.K.
	24-28	The London TV Screenings 2025	London, U.K.
March 2025	17-20	Hong Kong FILMART 2025	Hong Kong
	25-27	Series Mania Forum 2025	Lille, Hauts-de-France

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For editorial info, contact Janine at janine@contentasia.tv
To advertise in any of *ContentAsia's* publications or online,
contact Malena Amzah at malena@contentasia.tv (Asia, Australia and Middle East)
or Leah Gordon at leah@contentasia.tv (Americas and Europe)
or CJ Yong at cj@contentasia.tv (China, Taiwan)

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Heeramandi dominates India demand

Prime Video titles sweep digital originals rankings

Amazon Prime Video swept digital demand in India for the week of 10-16 May. But nothing the streamer offered could top the outsize appetite for Netflix's **Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar**, according to data science company Parrot Analytics.

Despite mixed reviews, the Sanjay Leela Bhansali epic has topped every ranking since its debut on 1 May. Data platform FlixPatrol has the eight-episode series in #1 spot in India for May, toppling **The Great Indian Kapil Show** from its second day.

The exception was 18 May, when Netflix's **Bridgerton** reigned for a single day.

Demand for Prime Video titles remained high though, led by **Panchayat** in second place on the digital originals list, followed by **Farzi** and **Mirzapur**.

The other two Prime Video titles on the demand top 10 for the week were **The Family Man** and **Aspirants**.

Heeramandi and **Panchayat** attracted enough demand to put them in top spots on the overall list of titles measured by Parrot Analytics in India.

Top 10 overall TV shows: India

Rank	Title	Difference from Market Average
1	Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar	77.62
2	Panchayat	41.86
3	Game Of Thrones	38.40
4	House Of The Dragon	36.02
5	Farzi (फर्जी)	33.53
6	Mirzapur	32.44
7	Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai (ये रिश्ता क्या कहलाता है)	32.14
8	The Great Indian Kapil Show (द ग्रेट इंडियन कपलि शो)	30.66
9	The Family Man (द फ़ैमिली मैन)	30.05
10	Dil Dosti Dilemma	29.02

Top 10 digital originals: India

Rank	Title	Platform	Difference from Market Average
1	Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar	Netflix	77.62
2	Panchayat	Amazon Prime Video	41.86
3	Farzi (फर्जी)	Amazon Prime Video	33.53
4	Mirzapur	Amazon Prime Video	32.44
5	The Great Indian Kapil Show (द ग्रेट इंडियन कपलि शो)	Netflix	30.66
6	The Family Man (द फ़ैमिली मैन)	Amazon Prime Video	30.05
7	Kavya - Ek Jazbaa, Ek Junoon	SonyLIV	28.75
8	College Romance	SonyLIV	26.38
9	Aspirants	Amazon Prime Video	24.20
10	X-Men '97	Disney+	23.81

Date range: 10-16 May 2024

The total audience demand being expressed for a title, within a market. Audience demand reflects the desire, engagement and viewership, weighted by importance; so a stream/download is a higher expression of demand than a 'like' /comment. In this dataset we are comparing the demand that exists for each series in this market, against the average TV show. A difference of 1x represents the market average and 10x means a series is ten times more in demand than the average TV show in this market



Editorial Director

Janine Stein

janine@contentasia.tv

Events Manager

CJ Yong

cj@contentasia.tv

ContentAsia Marketing & Awards

Heather Berger

heather@contentasia.tv

Design

Rae Yong

Research

Rhealyn Rigodon

iyah@contentasia.tv

Associate Publisher

(Americas, Europe) and VP, International Business Development

Leah Gordon

leah@contentasia.tv

Assistant Publisher

(Asia/Middle East)

Malena Amzah

malena@contentasia.tv

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