

# Bollywood still upbeat about big-budget spectacles despite misfires

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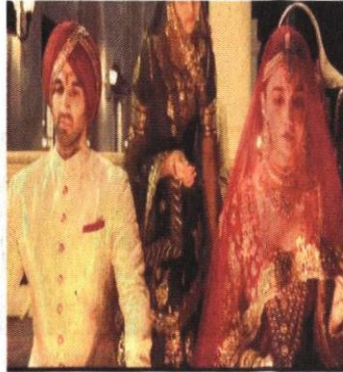
At last count, Karan Johar's period drama *Kalank*'s domestic box office collections had just touched ₹80 crore and Hollywood blockbuster *Avengers: Endgame* crossed the ₹350 crore mark. Made on a budget of ₹150 crore and released on 17 April, *Kalank* is the latest of Bollywood's big-budget spectacles to fail, after action adventure *Thugs of Hindostan* and Shah Rukh Khan-starrer *Zero*. For an industry that has witnessed failures of these three big-budget films, the faith in visual spectacles is somewhat surprising. But with nearly ₹1,500 crore riding on about a

dozen films in the next year and a half, such films remain a draw for moviegoers, film industry experts said. Through 2020, Bollywood has a slew of big-budget, star-driven films to attract audiences to theatres in an era where streaming services and slice-of-life stories vie for eyeballs.

Salman Khan's historical period drama *Bharat* is scheduled to release on Eid next month. It will be followed by multilingual action film *Saaho* starring *Baahubali* star Prabhas; a dance film featuring Hrithik Roshan and Tiger Shroff produced by Yash Raj Films (YRF); *Street Dancer 3D* starring Varun Dhawan; Ashutosh Gowariker's period drama *Panipat*; Ajay Devgn's *Taanaji: The Unsung Warrior*; Sanjay Leela

Bhansali's next directorial venture *Inshallah*; Rohit Shetty's action film *Sooryavanshi* with Akshay Kumar; YRF's action adventure *Shamsher* with Ranbir Kapoor; and Karan Johar's three mega-budget projects—*Brahmastra*, *Takht* and *Ramdhoomi*.

"As the number of films being produced is increasing every year, the clutter is inevitable. We are not just competing with Hindi films but Hollywood big-ticket films are also vying for the same screens. As a producer, I would do my best to present the audience with content that is entertaining, engaging and hopefully worth their buck," said Bhushan Kumar, chairman and managing director of T-Series, co-producer of *Saaho* and *Street*



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*Dancer 3D*. "This is an unpredictable business. There are no guarantees. You focus on creating good content and do your best in telling a good story with the tools available to you. The rest is not in your hands," Kumar added.

Trade experts say there is much going for big-budget spectacles despite the huge sums at stake. Such big-ticket films, or tent-pole films, manage good deals on selling rights to other platforms. "Ancillary streams become very crucial

for these films, be it satellite TV rights, home video, music, overseas theatrical releases or digital streaming," said Atul Mohan, editor of trade magazine *Complete Cinema*.

*Kalank*, for instance, Mohan added, made about ₹75 crore from the sale of satellite TV and digital rights, ₹25 crore from music and ₹20 crore from overseas distribution rights. Trade website Box Office India pointed out that the producers' share of global box office revenue will in fact be lower than the film's revenue from other streams, though the two will eventually make sure it isn't a loss-making proposition.

That said, there are some strategies that producers of these tent-pole films need to tweak. For one, their releases

are unnecessarily wide. Experts say with 4,000 screens across India, Bollywood's biggest films make 80% of their revenue only from the top 500 screens.

"Simple things like making sure two neighbouring theatres have at least a one-hour gap between two shows would help in improving occupancy," Mohan

explained, referring to the tendency of producers to hoard screens. *Avengers: Endgame* crossed the ₹350 crore mark with only 2,845 screens. Secondly, ticket prices are hiked by nearly 100% in some cases

which acts as a further deterrent. Though, ultimately it boils down to unimpressive content. Along with visual appeal, Bollywood's biggest films will have to ensure great

storytelling. "Earlier a film could generate hype on the basis of big stars or director. But now as the world becomes more connected and feedback is instant, the content has to be compulsive

enough for people to move out of home and see the film on the big screen. A mere visual extravaganza will not work," said Siddharth Bhardwaj, chief marketing officer—head of enterprise sales at UFO Moviez.

**Big budget films manage good deals by selling rights for satellite TV, digital streaming and overseas releases**