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Havana, January 7 (RHC/JIT)-- Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) commissioner Atsushi Saito warned on Thursday that the league's spring training, scheduled to start on February 1, could begin without the presence of foreign players from each team, like last year.

The Japanese government is currently banning foreign nationals from entering the country due to the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic and it is not known when the ban will be lifted. It is also not known when international players will be able to report to their respective clubs.

Last year began with the expectation that everything would return to normal after the delay caused by the new coronavirus to the 2020 season. However, at the end of January a new wave of contagions forced the Japanese government to declare a state of emergency and close its borders.

As a result, most foreign players entered the country in mid-March and did not start playing until the end of April, a month after the start of the regular campaign. It is feared that something similar will happen this time around.

Saito explained that the league will try to negotiate with the government an exception that will allow foreign athletes to enter the country to perform their duties, but there is no guarantee that the request will be accepted.

The regular campaign will begin on Friday, March 25 with six games. Interleague games will be spread over three weeks starting on May 24.

The all-star series will be held later than usual, in late July, but with the traditional two-game format. The first will be at Fukuoka's Pay Pay Dome on July 26, and the second at Matsuyama's Botchan Stadium on July 27.

The postseason start date has not been confirmed, but taking into account the 2021 schedule it will most likely occur on Saturday, October 8. The Japan Series schedule has already been defined. The action will begin on Saturday, October 22 at the stadium of the Central League representative.

The Cuban Baseball Federation represents several athletes in the Softbank Falcons and Chunichi Dragons clubs.

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